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Swinley's new skills zone

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Why riding boosts your mental health

The story behind Hope's carbon superbike

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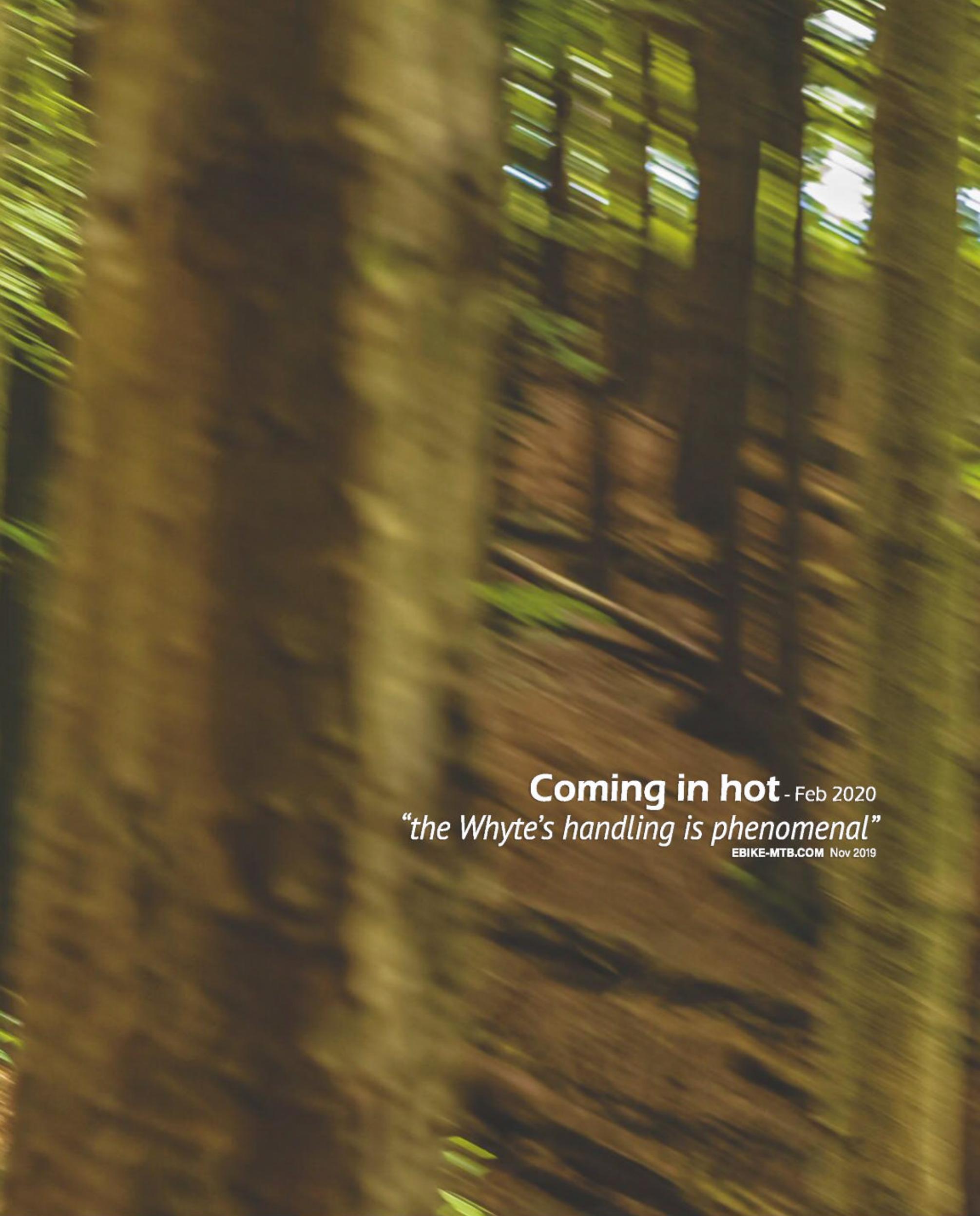
**8 of
the best
rated**





The 'phenomenal' Whyte e-180 RS lands in UK shops February 2020.
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Model shown e-180 RS SRP £5,750



Coming in hot - Feb 2020
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EBIKE-MTB.COM Nov 2019





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Photographer:
Tristan Tinn



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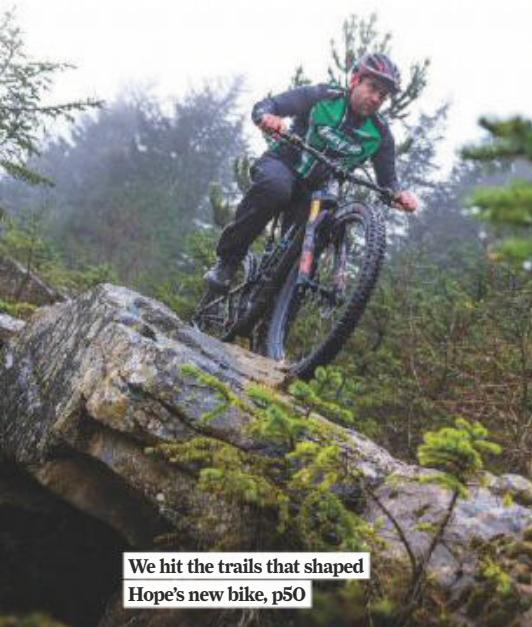
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Trail builder Rowan Sorrell has raced, ridden and dug tracks all over the world, and his favourite trail can be found in Jamaica — sounds like the perfect excuse to us to go and check out why it's so good

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Don't let rain stop play

Winter means it's time to boost your skills and strength

So far this winter has been record breaking — for all the wrong reasons. Rainfall has been almost incessant since the clocks went back, leaving trails swampy and saturated and motivation at an all-time low. But not so fast. This month, we show you how, by thinking outside the box, you can turn rain into gains.

Mucking about in the car park may seem like a waste of time — something for kids and show-offs — but spending time on your bike learning tricks can do amazing things for your balance and bike control. Transfer those skills back to the trails and it'll transform your riding. Andy Barlow from Dirt School gives you some pointers on page 66.

If you're already pretty handy, but feel weak and fatigued on longer rides, maybe think about doing some strength training. If the thought of gym work fills you with boredom, our new series of drills with Fit4Racing is something that will benefit your riding on as little as two hours' training a week. Read more on page 24.

Hopefully by keeping busy, trying new things and achieving specific goals, you can survive the slop and emerge from winter fitter, faster and stronger than ever before.



Editor, mbr

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like a, well, you know...

SILVERFISH-UK.COM

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Big picture

After weeks of creative conception, I headed north to Wyoming for the total solar eclipse in August 2017. The goal was to capture the eclipse and showcase mountain biking utilising an in-camera double exposure. After capturing the first image successfully during two minutes of totality, all we had to do was endure the midday sun, waiting for twilight and the attempt at the second frame. Unfortunately, I was unaware I had damaged the hot shoe connection on my camera, preventing me from triggering my flashes. Our only option required Chris Brule to hit the feature in near darkness, allowing me to set the camera to a 2.5-second exposure, firing the flashes and freezing Chris mid-air.

Red Bull Illume 2019, Noah Wetzel







Big picture

Crystalline spicules of frost form upon the desolate fell tops. When suitably humid air meets the ground frost, spicules form, if the moisture does not pass the liquid phase. These minuscule spicules of frost are individual masterpieces of nature, something all too easy to overlook, as our attention is stolen by the wider view of the landscape around us. Take a pause for thought next time you ride. Consider an alternative viewpoint. Sometimes it's good to look at things differently.

Tristan Tinn



mtb

Edited by Jamie Darlow

GEAR

RIDES

FAST & FIT

INSPIRATION

GET STARTED



PAY MONTHLY MTB

Swinley has a new skills zone called The Summit, and it uses a unique subscription model

Music, TV, phone, car, gym, books, meat, underwear... you name it, you can pay for it monthly with a subscription service. It's quickly become the default method of spreading costs. And now you can add riding your bike to that list with the launch of The Summit, a pay-monthly skills venue at Swinley in Berkshire.

Designed and built by Tom Reynolds, little brother to Sam and freeride pinner in his own

right, the new skills park features a range of carefully designed obstacles, expertly packaged into a 10-acre site. More on the details later, because perhaps the most interesting thing about The Summit is the payment plan that could be a first for UK mountain biking.

"It's super scary for us, as mountain bikers are new to all this, but we've tried to find a model that works for everyone," Tom says.

The model goes something like this. There are three levels of membership, Gold, Silver

and Bronze, costing £30, £20 or £10 a month respectively. Bronze membership gets you an induction session and two open sessions per month where you can go along and ride. That's not the whole picture though, membership also gets you on to one group coaching session a year. "So that's £120 a year, which is almost the price of an average coaching session," Tom says. "We wanted to make the pricing super easy for people." Gold and Silver allow you greater access and more coaching.





The Summit isn't a bike park then, it's a training zone and a stage for Tom and his team to teach mountain biking skills, and your subscription gets you a coaching session per year. Bolted onto that is access to The Summit.

"It's like anything really; skills coach Tom has a rock climbing membership, I have a gym membership, and this is just taking it to mountain bikers in a really good value way."

THE COACH

Tom is one of the new school of skills coaches, passionate, prodigiously talented on the bike, but also patient and dedicated to teaching people the sport he loves.

"The Summit is for all abilities, it's not elitist because everyone is here for the same thing, to improve their skills, although everyone's goal is different," Tom says.

"That's one of the reasons we're capping the membership at 200-300 — compare that to

IT COULD ACT AS A CYCLING HUB/CLUB WITH THE SENSE OF BELONGING AND CAMARADERIE THAT BRINGS

the trail network here that has 400,000 riders on it a year," he says. "We wanted to call it a destination so people feel like they're going somewhere; it's all about reaching your peak."

Tom has built The Summit for that purpose. Anyone familiar with Swinley will remember that it did have a new skills area just a few years ago that was completed but never officially opened.

"It was a volunteer project that didn't hugely follow the plans," Tom says. "It had to be progressive, but it started too big with an 8ft drop, and the Crown Estate, which owns the land, didn't sign it off."

That skills area was unworkable and had

to be flattened, and there were two rules for The Summit to follow, Tom says. It had to be progressive, and it wasn't to be a bike park in the way we think of one, where you turn up and ride what you see. "It's an SSSI, so there's a lot of nature they want to protect, and I think having a bike park was just a little bit rowdy when they wanted something managed," he says.

FUTURE SUMMIT

Tom has big plans for The Summit, with phase two starting in a year's time with a review of the trails, and reshaping or changing the parts that need it. There will also be a natural gym at the



The Summit's singletrack is just a stone's throw from the Lookout

top of the hill with Rocky-style logs and natural weights to work on, while back on the bike a pump track and skinnies are also being mooted.

"Phase three... I don't know. It would be good to have a pro line from top to bottom," Tom says. "Something like the DMR Line at Rogate that's got that feel, that vibe of awe. But I'll be happiest when I'm at the top of the hill and surrounded by people just riding it all."

The Summit does have a good feel to it; everything we rode felt well made, and despite the rinsing the UK has received recently, it's holding up OK. It's not a venue that will draw in riders from across the land, Tom knows it and he's set the place up differently to your average bike park. Instead, we think it will attract a loyal membership of southern riders looking to hone their skills and push their boundaries. It's more than that though, The Summit could act more like a cycling hub/club, with all the sense of belonging and camaraderie that brings. That's got to be worth £10 a month.



Members will have the chance to 'unlock' some serious air

THE SUMMIT TRAILS

Managed means there's supervised riding, with an instructor overseeing everything for safety, with trails unlocked as and when members ask for them. Those trails start small, with a Fundamentals Zone, "full of small and friendly versions of the obstacles that intimidate people," Tom says. Then there's a Dual Zone, 180m of dual slalom track that diverges in the middle before coming back together again for the finish. "I got the inspiration from Crankworx; it adds theatre if you don't know where the other person is," Tom explains.

The Drop Zone is next. It features progressive drops from 1ft to 6ft, and two lines, all with exit paths if you want to bail out. "That's a way to really quickly progress to a level that maxes out the UK race series," Tom says. "You don't find a drop bigger than 6ft in the UK enduro race series. The idea really was to build everything here that people will come across in other parts of the country. So we have a 40ft table, a 12ft drop and big gaps too."

Naturally, there are gaps at The Summit then. The Jump Zone has a Red and Black Line — the Red features clever split jumps

with one side of a take-off built as a table, and the other side dug out to form a proper gap. "That means once you're happy with the distance you can hit the gap and get over the mental barrier," Tom says. The Black Line has 10ft tables, into 12ft gaps that actually cross the Red Line and act as a qualifier for the big 40ft table finisher.

You have to earn the trails though, Tom explains. "You pay in ability. You have to show that you can do a

smaller line perfectly, then we'll unlock the next feature."

There's also an Enduro Line with more natural feeling features, and a Technical Line loam track that'll be scraped back in again every six months. And wrapping it all up are the Hero Drops — an eight and a 12ft wooden ladder step down, definitely something for most of us to build up to, and as yet Tom is the only rider to have landed the 12-footer.



A series of Lines have been laid out at The Summit

HOT STUFF

WHAT WE'RE EXCITED ABOUT THIS MONTH

MOST
WANTED

RRP PROGUARD BOLT ON £35.99

The new ProGuard Bolt On is one of those products that it's hard to believe no one thought of before. RRP has taken its excellent ProGuard and added a mount that'll attach to certain fork braces via a couple of bolts, transforming it into a neat, waste-free and easily removable guard in one fell swoop. So long zip-ties, rubber bands and Velcro straps.

We like it because it could be the easiest and quickest oversized mudguard out there to fit or remove. Rejoice all ye who transport their bike in the boot of their car and have to lay it flat, as this has been bending and deforming mudguards for years. Remove the bolts and keep your guard straight for easy portage, or quickly adapt to changing trail conditions pre-ride.

Hang on a minute though, surely this is nothing new? Marzocchi had one 10 years ago, more recently DVO forks have come with bolt-on guards, and there's also the Syncros Trail Fender, but these two are both too small to provide decent mud coverage. Then there's the huge Crud XL Fender — not the sleekest solution. The only guard to match it is Mojo's Dfender, which clamps to the fork brace of Fox forks and older Marzocchi forks... but it costs almost £50.



The ProGuard Bolt On comes in two lengths: Mini at 388mm and Standard at 503mm. You can fine-tune the angle of the guard with tilt brackets (supplied), and adjust the height by 6mm to fit all wheel sizes and up to a 3in tyre. There are rubber bumpers on the guard's side to brace against the fork legs, and the whole thing is made in the UK.

It's not all clover though — the new guard fits most Fox, new Marzocchi, Öhlins and Suntour forks, but not those from RockShox. Nor is RRP planning to anytime soon. Brackets to fit DVO, X-Fusion, Cane Creek and the Fox 40 are in the works, though, according to the company. Full test coming soon.
extrauk.co.uk



DIGITAL VECTRA

This smart-looking Vectra glove from Dakine is built on a four-way stretch mesh shell for comfort, and features a silicone mesh palm with touch-screen-compatible fingers. It's cuffless, comes in three colours and even has a two-year warranty. £30, dakine.com



STAR CRAFT

The Alpine Stars Nevada Thermal Jacket is built for super-cold days, and combines a ripstop softshell outer, wind membrane and brushed mesh lining. Features include stretch inserts for movement, vents, pre-curved sleeves, hood and zipped pockets. £140, Alpinestars.com



SKID LID

Cube's ANT kids' helmet has 11 vents complete with insect nets to stay cool and bug-free, and a big dial to tighten it up and keep it in place. Comes in six lairy colours and there's a light on the back too. £39.95, cube.eu



WHERE WOLF

More stealthy storage, this time courtesy of Wolf Tooth and its EnCase System. There's a 14-function Allen-key wrench to slide into one bar end, and a chain tool and tyre-plug ensemble to go into the other. Sold separately or as a combo. \$119.95, wolftoothcomponents.com



BODY FORM

The Megmeister Dynamo Winter base layer boasts good wicking and cold-weather insulation as well as antibacterial and anti-odour properties. Seamless for less irritation, it has a dropped hem at the back, and comes in two sizes and three colours. £59.95, megmeister.com



PEDAL PUSHERS

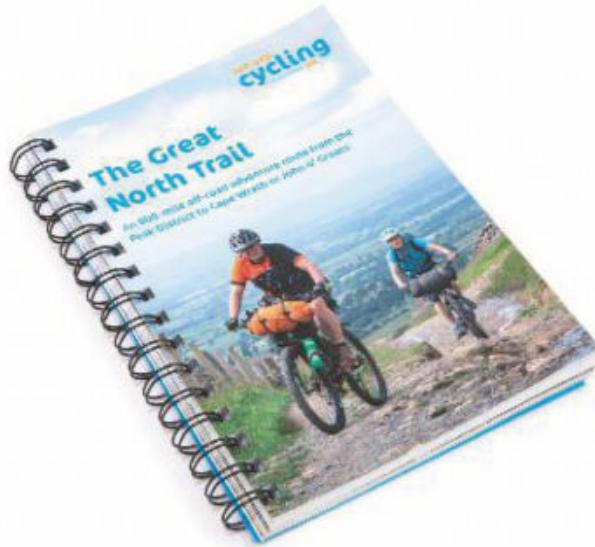
The Gravity Strix shoe is a burly, clipless number from Cube. Designed to offer maximum protection for your plates, it features a reinforced toe box and neoprene instep to cushion your ankle. Laces are secured with a Velcro tab, there's a mesh toe, and lace holder. £149.95, cube.eu



FUNN FACTORY

These Fundamantal Pedals from Funn have an innovative grease port on the pedal body to keep them spinning. Made from 6061 alloy, running on cartridge bearings and sealed bushings, and bristling with 24 pins.

£75, funnmtb.com



THE HIGH ROAD

Pieced together by Cycling UK, the Great North Trail is an 800-mile route linking the Peak District with Scotland's most northerly mainland points, taking in the Pennine Bridleway and Cross Borders Drove Road.

Free to view and download, cyclinguk.org



ROCKETMAN

Add your wrist measurement, riding style and body shape to the WTB website and it'll now tell you your ultimate saddle, thanks to the new WTB Fit Right System. Ours is the Rocket, in narrow, with Ti rails.

£109.99, [WTB.com](http://wtb.com)



RIDE FUEL

SIS says its Beta Fuel energy drink lets your body absorb 90g of carbohydrate per hour, 50 per cent more than from glucose alone. It comes in two flavours and is designed to be easy on your stomach, too.

£2.50, scienceinsport.com



EASY RIDER

Specialized has stitched together casual hoodie styling and mountain bike performance, with the Thermal Mountain Jersey, for cool, dry days. It features two pockets (side and breast), three-panel hood and longer arms for riding coverage.

£75, specialized.com



FOAMO

Dirt Juice from Juice Lubes is a biodegradable bike cleaner-come-light-degreaser, and now features a Super Foamy Trigger to maximise the froth levels and help you cut through the crud.

£7.99, juicelubes.co.uk



PRO SENDER CORE SKILLS TRAINER £139.99

This is the Sender Core Skills Trainer (CST), but it's probably better known as the Manual Machine, and if it came in a tin it would do exactly what it says on the side. Pulling and holding a manual is the Holy Grail for both showing off in the car park and progressing your skills, and Sender claims the CST can make the process easier and safer.

Built from wood, and with stainless steel

fixings, this Pro version is robust enough for coaches to use, according to Sender Ramps. Pop your back wheel into the uprights (it'll take anything from 20in to 29in wheels), then practise finding that balance point. There's a loop-out strap to stop you from, you know, looping out, and this new version will take stretchy resistance bands to make finding the balance point that bit easier.

Sender says there's loads more to the CST — it'll work as a bike stand, you can do a gym workout on it, or use it as a tool station if you buy the upgrade kit. But most people are going to use it for one thing only, learning the hallowed art of the manual. Anything that makes that just a little bit easier has got to be good, we reckon.
sender-ramps.com

NO-MOUNTAIN RIDES

Five rides for short winter days, lacking stature but overflowing with fun, as chosen by Sim Mainey

DOETHIE VALLEY, CARMARTHEN

22.85km (14.19 miles)

Riding time is precious and limited, especially in winter. Rides that get to the point (ie. the fun stuff) and pack a punch are what we're after. The Doethie Valley doesn't mess about. You pedal to the top of the valley on admittedly dull tracks but you are paid back with one long, sweet hit

of top-quality singletrack. We've named it Trail Of The Year in the past and every time we ride it we're reminded why — it just keeps the good stuff coming. It's the kind of trail you get to the end of and think, "And that wasn't built for mountain bikes?" While the route itself is relatively

low level, it is in a remote area so still demands respect for conditions and provisions — last time I rode it in the height of summer, I ran out of water and gasped the last mile back to the car. The irony of it finishing at a reservoir was not lost on me.

GPS download po.st/doethie





KINDER SCOUT, THE PEAK DISTRICT 22.85km (14.19 miles)

Despite the name, The Peak District has plenty of good riding without you having to bag any peaks. In fact there are only three actual mountains in the UK's most visited National Park. This ride takes you close to the highest of these, Kinder Scout, and despite not being big in outright elevation it certainly has a big country feel.

Rocky best sums up the riding here. Big rocks, little rocks, ordered rocks and random rocks — who needs a mountain descent anyway when you have The Peak. That's not to say the riding here is one dimensional, though. Moorland singletrack and picturesque bridleways add variety few mountains have, as well as providing a break from the rock-based battering. Despite the heavy rock content, weather and heavy use can take their toll on the trails here, so ride responsibly.

GPS download po.st/peakdistrict



LYNTON, EXMOOR 23.82km (14.80 miles)

You don't get much lower than sea level without attaching SPD flippers, but this route lets you dip your tyres in the sea if you fancy it. The combes and coves that make up the north of Exmoor are filled with rainforest and fun trails of the steep, rocky, rooty, twisty kind.

Unfortunately that applies for both uphills and downhills, and even though you might not be racking up height in one fell swoop you'll have gained and lost a lot more altitude than you thought you would. As a bonus the coastal views are stunning, plus this route passes through somewhere called The Valley Of Rocks — worth riding just for the name.

In summer you can finish the ride with a dip in the Bristol channel, in winter a pot of tea and fish and chips is a more tempting option.

GPS download po.st/exmoor

LONG MYND, SHROPSHIRE 24.57km (15.26 miles)

Mynd means mountain in Welsh, although strictly speaking this lump that straddles the English/Welsh border doesn't quite qualify for mountain status. That said, it's steep enough that your legs might say otherwise. At 516m Pole Bank is the highest point, and while this is a decent elevation, the actual 'good stuff' is hidden away lower down on the flanks of the valleys. The great but annoying thing about the Mynd is the number of options for getting up and down it. You are almost goaded into riding back up for 'just one more trail', despite the fact that there's no easy way to the top. It's worth it though and if you pack an OS OL217 map you'll have more than enough options for a day's worth of riding.

GPS download po.st/longmynd

BORROWDALE BASH, CUMBRIA 27.11km (16.84 miles)

If you're looking for a non-mountain ride then The Lakes might not be the most obvious place to go, but The Borrowdale Bash is a clever loop. It manages to take you around and about rather than up and over the fells. This is a ride with a real big-mountain feel thanks to its grand surroundings. Combined with some great bits of trail, it's possible to feel like you've done a proper day in the mountains. Sure, keeping to lower terrain means you're more likely to bump into other trail users, but it's The Lake District — you have to really go out of your way to find true peace and quiet. Fun fact: I have a wonky nose thanks to a pair of crap tyres and a slab of wet slate on the Watendlath descent.

GPS download po.st/borrowdalebash



MTB'ING SAVES

More and more of us are finding solace in the singletrack

Mountain biking is a great way of distracting yourself from the commitments and pressures of everyday life. It keeps you fit, it's sociable, and it's a great way of discovering new places or leading you on epic adventures.

Is there more to it though? Should we consider a ride with some old buddies a crucial part of our mental health? And can we use mountain biking to switch on new learners? In this article, Andy Barlow from Dirt School breaks down a few different clients that he's worked with over the years and how the sport of mountain biking ties them all together through one shared experience.

TURN AROUND

A few years ago I was working in a local bike shop and we had a guy that used to come by and wash the windows every month. Through chatting with him every few weeks it turned

out that he'd raced BMX back in the Eighties, and that he'd stopped riding altogether when he ruined one of his knees landing after a parachute jump in the TA. Over the years he'd stopped exercising, put on a bit of weight, and seemed keen to get back into it.

We ended up selling him a heavy-duty hardtail with chunky tyres and a good quality long-travel fork. It was incredible to see him ride. Everyone would have to wait for him on the climbs at first, but he'd blow absolutely anyone away and the descents. Over the next few months we watched him lose tons of weight, set some decent goals, and less than two years later he was racing in mountain marathon events on a light weight full-susser. Mountain biking had got him fit again, helped him deal with the death of his mother, and turned his life around.

GOOD TO TALK

Quite often if we work with a client who wants

a series of one-to-one sessions, they turn up with a particular goal in mind. It might be an event in the future, a riding holiday to an exotic place, or perhaps they want to get more out of a new bike and keep up with their mates. Inevitably as the sessions progress though, you get to know them fairly well.

These are normally people who run their own businesses, have teams of people look up to them, or are in charge of a team. They understand the value in training somebody properly and that's one of the reasons that they're getting lessons from us. During those sessions we've had people open up about divorces, talk about building and selling their companies, difficulties that they're going through with family members. It's almost like as they get better on their bikes they're also making progress in their lives. The mountain bike is a metaphor for how to get their head around their problems and continually move

LIVES

forwards. By helping them achieve their goals we also allow them to overcome all kinds of problems.

BASE MOUNTAIN BIKING

For over 10 years, Dirt School has worked with Borders College in the Scottish Borders to run a genuine academic course that focuses on performance mountain biking. Students study modules in anatomy, nutrition, psychology, and strength and conditioning.

They also get to ride their bikes twice a week as part of a structured syllabus that starts with body position, and goes right through to setting goals in competition. Through Dirt School's involvement we essentially break down riding problems into their component parts, work on their weaknesses, then get them to rebuild it stronger and with a plan or particular goal in mind. We typically attract riders and racers that wouldn't really consider

themselves academically intelligent. We get them hooked through riding, but in time switch them on intellectually and encourage them to take this same approach to their academic work at the college. As the course goes on they start to work out that they can apply this same strategy to passing their modules, running a business, travelling to New Zealand or Canada for a season, or even go to university. The real trick is that they think they're there to learn about riding their bikes. We're there to help them become awesome human beings.

SAVING LIVES

When I was a kid I was uncontrollable. I had so much energy that no one knew how to handle me. My mum would have to take me to the park and tire me out before we did anything social, or I'd be jumping all over the furniture. As I went through school I was always being told to sit still, stop running, wait for everyone else, or

to slow down. I couldn't understand it because it was so natural for me to want to climb higher or go faster. When I started mountain biking it all clicked. Straight away my parents could see I was in my element.

They quickly started taking me to races where I was suddenly being encouraged to go faster, push myself harder, or jump further. I've been hooked on that same feeling for the last 25 years, and still enjoy seeing what my now broken and battered body is capable of. It's been a hell of a journey so far and I can't imagine functioning as a normal human being without having the physical and mental escape of mountain biking. It's taught me focus and discipline. It's prepared me for running a business, allowed me to gain qualifications, and has now been my job for over 10 years. Mountain biking has saved my life in so many ways. All my best friends ride, and I honestly don't know what I would have done without it.

GET FIT FOR RIDING

Let your bike know who's the boss this year with the help of our tailor-made strength sessions

We all want to be better riders. Whether it's railing corners faster, learning to jump, muscling up steep technical climbs, or simply reacting to terrain in the blink of an eye and making better line choices.

But just like any physical pursuit, practice alone won't make perfect. You need to train, because being stronger and fitter will make every other aspect of riding easier. And while we're all happy to spend hours on the bike working on specific skills, or simply riding around hoping to improve, a more focused approach can bring more rapid results. So if you want to improve, but only get the opportunity to ride once or twice a week, keep reading.

In as little as two hours per week, you can do as much off-bike training as some pro riders. By training sensibly you can fill in strength and intensity deficits in a short space of time, eliminate areas that are holding you back and reap massive benefits on the bike. We're not saying it's going to be easy, but it won't take the hours of monotonous gym time you might think.

This month we're going to cover the kit you need to get started and one fundamental exercise, the push-up. So even if you have no gym equipment, you can set this magazine down and get after it in your living room. We'll bring you new exercises each month and they will all be scalable, so it doesn't matter where you are on your fitness journey — you'll still be able to join in and improve.

THE COACH

Jonny Thompson is head coach for Fit4Racing, an online fitness programme for mtb riders.

Once a forensic scientist, Jonny has devoted the last 10 years to coaching athletes from Paralympians to world number one enduro racers. His main focus with the Fit4Racing team is developing and delivering fitness programmes to pro and amateur riders. Training the likes of Adam Brayton, Jonny also sends digital programmes to riders all over the world, many of whom ride professionally.



GETTING STARTED... WHAT EQUIPMENT DO I NEED?

Having access to gym equipment will increase the benefits of training massively, but we understand it's not always practical or affordable to have a pro-level gym where you live. Which is why we have created three levels of equipment, based on available space and funds. Also, if time is tight, having a good garage gym will make it much easier to train efficiently than attending a commercial gym — not to mention savings on the monthly membership.

■ LEVEL 1 THE WEEKEND WARRIOR

1 Kettlebell / Pull-up bar / Resistance bands – Total cost: £100-150

■ LEVEL 2 THE QUIETLY COMPETITIVE

Gymnastic rings (TRX) / Medicine ball / Plyo Box (bench) / Cardio equipment + All Level 1 kit – Total cost £250-300

■ LEVEL 3 THE ULTIMATE RIDER

Barbell & weight plates / Squat rack / Wattbike or rowing machine + All Level 1 and Level 2 kit – Total cost £2,000-2,500





WATCH THE VIDEO

at po.st/pressup

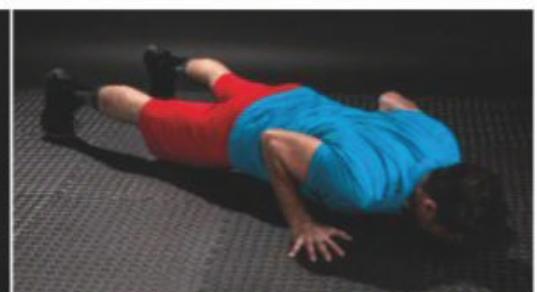
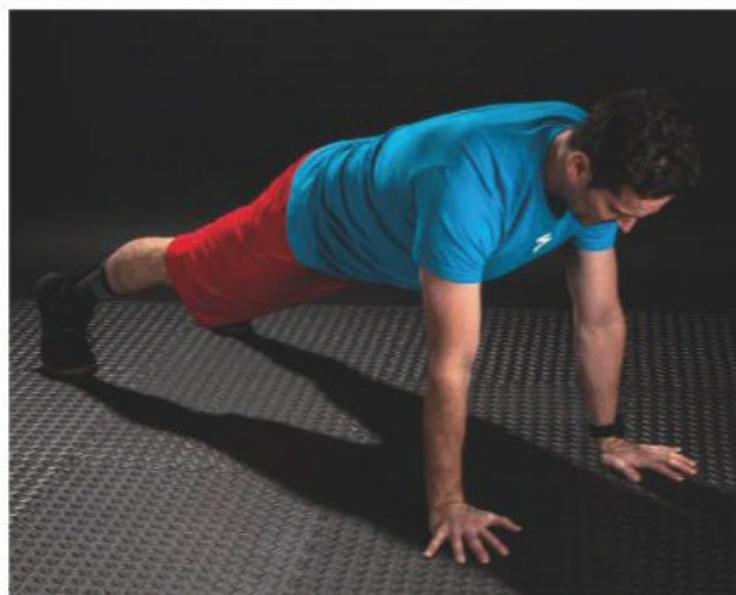


FUNDAMENTAL EXERCISE: THE PRESS-UP (OR PUSH-UP)

The press-up is an amazing full body exercise that's stood the test of time. Not only does it target the very muscles you need to hold a confident riding position on the

bike, it also activates your core and butt, so it improves overall stability too. Doing press-ups regularly will increase your upper body strength quicker than

riding alone, as the stress and adaptation is much greater. So if you want to take your handling in technical terrain to the next level, add press-ups to your training.

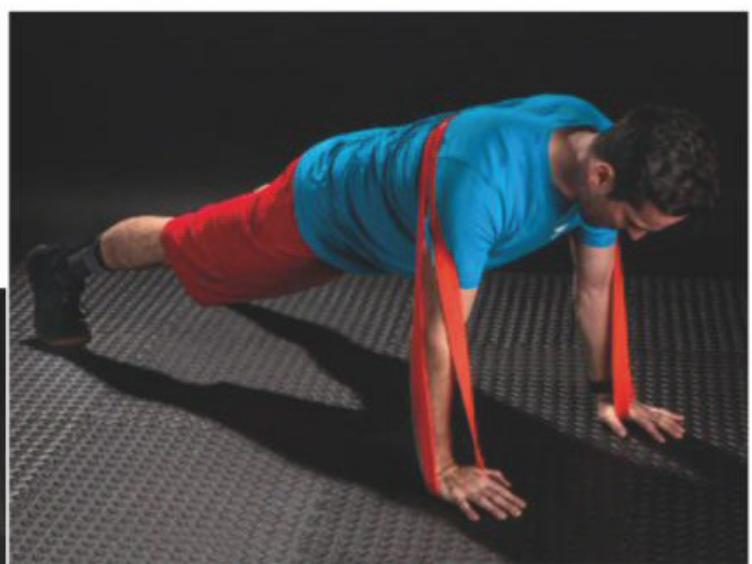


■ LEVEL 1 FULL PRESS-UP

Doing a full press-up where your chest touches the floor is a great achievement. And doing 10 reps is the benchmark. Don't get soft when it gets hard though a dipping lower back could be a sign of a weak core. Can't do 10 full press-ups yet? Scale back and go to your knees.

■ LEVEL 2 BANDED PRESS-UPS

If you're confident with the press-up and can do multiple sets of 10 with strict form, then to progress you need to make the exercise more difficult. Using a band for more resistance will help overload the muscles and increase the benefits.



■ LEVEL 3 FLOOR PRESS

If you have a barbell and weights, the floor press is a great way to overload the muscles involved in pressing. The range of motion

is restricted but this actually makes it a better option than the traditional barbell bench press for riders with cranky shoulders. Once you can do three sets of 10

with good form, increase the total weight on the bar by 2.5kg. If the gym you train in doesn't have fractional weight plates, buy some and keep them in your kit bag.



NEXT
MONTH
THE SQUAT

CLEAN UP IN THE MUD

Removing mud-spattered clothes without painting your car interior brown is easy with a little planning and the right kit

If you ride when it's wet and muddy it's inevitable that some of that crud is going to get splattered all over your clothing and, if you've driven to the trails, your car's upholstery. It makes sense then, to have a bit of a post-ride clean up, and get rid of as much dirt as possible.

The first step to speed up post-ride cleaning is to wear full waterproofs. They're not always super-nice against the skin and, you may need to layer up in really cold weather, but you can peel off both top and bottoms and all the dirt goes with them. We'd also advise you to get changed on a portable changing matt/bag. There are several of these listed opposite, and they're basically large draw-string bags that you stand on when getting changed out of your wet gear. Once you've disrobed, you then pull up the strings and all the wet clobber is in a self-contained easy-to-handle bag that you can just throw in the back of the car without getting everything dirty.

Alternatively, there are several gear bags on the market with fold-out/removable changing mats, like the Showerspass Refuge Waterproof Duffel (£145, showerspass.co.uk) or Fox Podium Gear bag (£138, uk.foxracing.com).

If you decide not to wear full waterproof trousers and stick with shorts, you can clean off any splatter in two ways. First you could try this old XC racer tip — get a washing up bowl, stand in it (yes, that's right) fill it with some soapy water, which you've brought in a bottle, and mop yourself down with a sponge.

The other option is to use baby wipes or rather these huge versions designed for outdoor use. Durt Wipes (£6 pack of 20, durtwipes.com) and Wilderness Wipes (£3 pack of 12, seatosummit.co.uk) are both four times the sizes of regular baby wipes and much thicker too, meaning they'll get most of the clag off without falling apart. Both are eco-friendly and smell nice, bonus!

Once you've arrived back at the ranch, it's worth giving that dirty kit a hose down before bunging it in the washing machine. You just need a hose pipe, but to remove the worst mud a pressure washer is dead handy, especially for cleaning footwear and kneepads.

After a wet ride, there's also some clean-up, but if you plan ahead and follow our simple post-ride steps, you won't make a mountain out of a molehill or take it home with you.

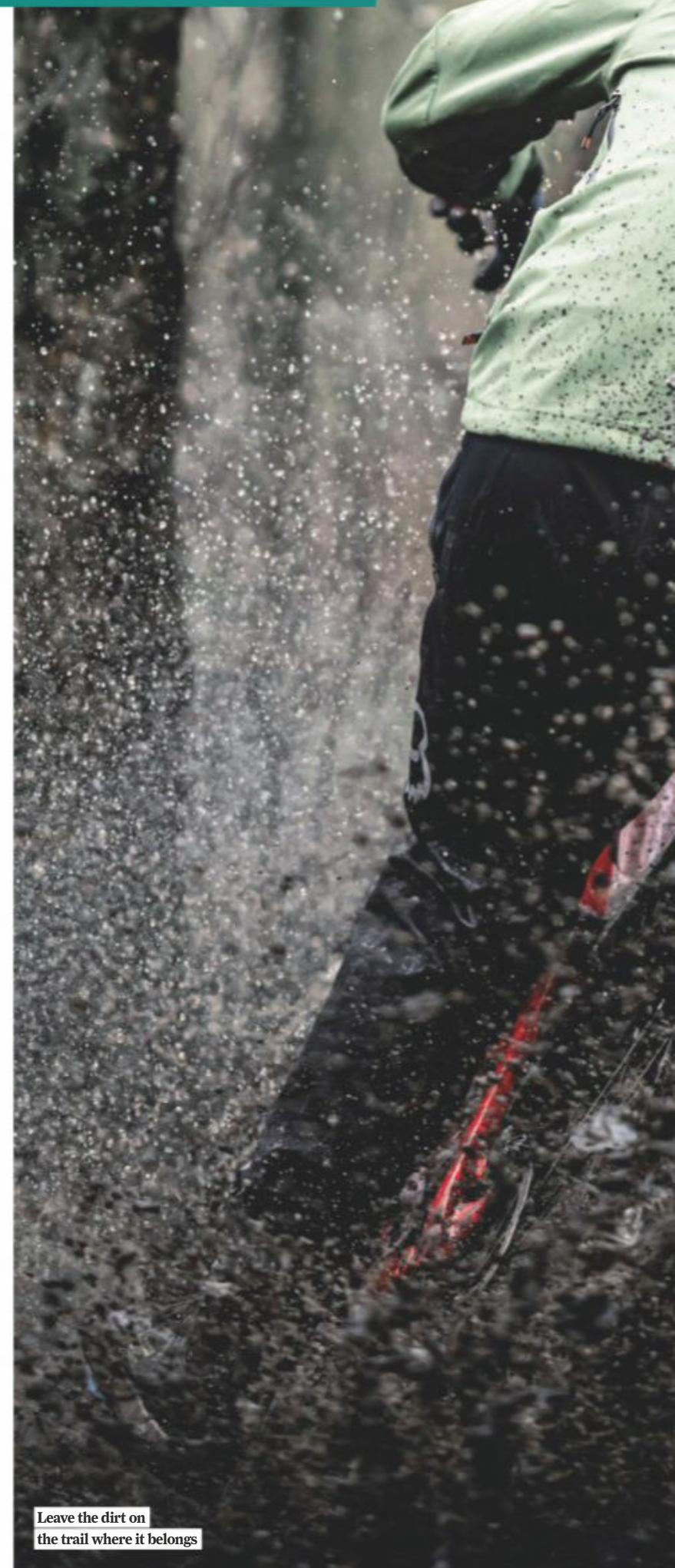
CLOTHING CARE

■ If you wear Lycra shorts under your waterproofs then you should wash them after every ride to kill any bacteria that may cause soreness or infections. It's best to use either non-bio washing powder or a dedicated sports wash, which can help retain the Lycra's wicking properties.

■ Waterproof cycling jackets lose their water resistance when you wash them, especially if you use a detergent. This strips off the

Durable Water Repellency (DWR) surface treatment, and once the fabric is sodden, it also impairs its breathability. Tech Wash from Nikwax cleans but also revitalises the DWR, even if you have used a conventional cleaner.

■ Despite using a dedicated cleaner, the DWR will need renewing. We recommend Nixwax TX Direct Spray-On because you can just boost the DWR where it's faded the most, like on the shoulders, elbows and knees.



Leave the dirt on
the trail where it belongs



DIRTY KIT BAGS

VROOM BAG £39.99

At over a foot in diameter, the Vroom Bag is twice the size of the Muc-Off Grime Bag. It's not as well-padded but the vast size means it can easily double as a boot liner or picnic mat. The Ripstop nylon material gets a waterproof lining to keep all the dirt in and the cords are big too, so it's easier to tighten. Features two mesh stuff pockets for cleaning gear, and it even comes with a carry pouch. The perfect mtb changing matt, currently on sale at the Vroom site.

vroombag.com



MUC-OFF GRIME BAG £29.99

Although this is not as big as the Vroom bag, the Muc-Off Grime Bag has a lip round the edge to keep all the dirt and any spills in check. It's built from a coated polyester and is also thickly padded, so you won't stub a toe on hard ground when standing in bare feet. Extra-long draw-strings allow you to really batten down the hatches. Features twin carry handles for easy transportation and storage.

muc-off.com

FOX TRANSITION DUFFLE £95

Built into the bottom of the Transition Duffle is a square changing mat and expandable wet space. The mat isn't padded, but it packs away neatly and the compartment will swallow dirty clothes and footwear. Gets a ton of internal organisation, and waterproof zips stop the dry stuff getting wet. A twin shoulder harness lets you sling it on your back if you have to ride home. A big investment, but the perfect privateer enduro/race bag.

uk.foxracing.com



ION WET BAG £27.99

Designed initially for surfers, the Ion Wet Bag can easily swallow your dirty mtb outfit, helmet and shoes. It's less padded than others, so a secondary padded tile may be in order, but you can do it up tight and the waterproof nylon material keeps a lid on errant dirt. It's lightweight, easy to keep clean and comes with a leash to hang it up.

Typical ION gear – top quality, great value and does what it says on the tin.

ion-products.com



SHOWERPASS REFUGE WATERPROOF DUFFLE £145

With three main internal compartments, the Refuge Waterproof Duffle ensures clean and dirty clothes are kept apart. It also has padded storage for delicate electronics and a ton of pockets for all those pre-race gels and potions. You also get removable padding and dividers to customise the storage, a mahoosive fold-out changing mat, and waterproof zips at all the openings to stop water ingress. Pricey but this a heavy-duty trail/race bag.

showerspass.co.uk



First rides

SWINGING A LEG OVER WHAT'S HOT THIS MONTH

TRUST SHOUT FORK

£1,900 / 29in / upgradebikes.co.uk

NEED TO KNOW

- Latest trailing linkage fork from Trust, boasting 178mm travel
- Full carbon construction, including links and tapered steerer
- Takes regular 15mm front hubs and is fully Torque Cap compatible
- Twin-tube damper with three-mode adjuster
- Weighs in at 2.23kg (4.92lb) including 15mm alloy axle

The Shout fork certainly looks radical, but can it live up to Trust's bold claims?

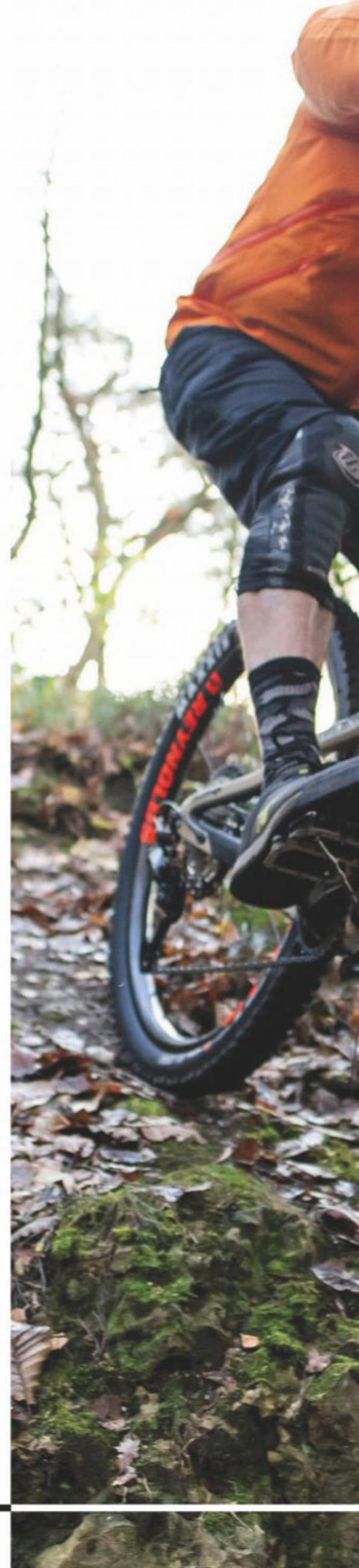
What is it with suspension engineers and their overwhelming obsession with linkage forks? Maybe it's the desire to make a statement and produce something radically different. Or it could be, as complex as a linkage fork is, the advantages of being able to manipulate the axle path and progression rate make the endeavour genuinely worthwhile.

Either way, it's every suspension engineer's dream. To make the Trust fork a reality, however, it actually took the merging of three great minds. Dave Weagle developed the suspension design, Jason Schiers, formerly of Enve Composites, transformed it into a carbon reality, while Hap Seliga,

co-founder of Competitive Cyclist, was charged with delivering the goods.

On the table, the Trust Shout is an impressive-looking piece of kit. Constructed entirely from carbon, it's a trailing linkage design with 178mm of travel. On the scales it weighs 2.23kg (4.92lb), so it's a hair heavier than the equivalent RockShox Lyrik. But with an axle to crown height of 580mm, it's 1mm lower than a 170mm-travel Lyrik 29.

The Shout uses standard 110x15mm axle spacing, making it fully compatible with the current crop of Boost hubs. Trust also states that the same fork is 29in and 27.5in compatible, but this isn't really a unique feature as all 29er forks take 27.5in wheels. What's cool about the Shout though, is that it has





Very sensitive off the top... that initial touch is friction-free

inserts in the dropouts that snugly cup regular 15mm hubs for easy axle location, but these can also be removed to make it fully Torque Cap compatible, something we'll get deeper into in a minute.

It isn't just the linkage that makes this fork different. It has self-equalizing air-spring assemblies in both of those beefy carbon upper legs. And with no stanchions or O-rings to indicate sag, Trust employs a neat travel dial on one of the pivots to help with initial set-up.

A three-position compression lever atop the right leg delivers three distinct modes within easy reach: open, mid and firm, where even the firm setting remains active and plush for the first 20 per cent of the travel.

Halfway down the same leg, peeling back a small rubber seal reveals the adjusters for the twin-tube thru-shaft damper that lets you vary the low-speed compression damping and high-speed rebound using an 3mm Allen key. The main rebound adjuster resides at the base of right leg.

HOW IT RIDES

OK, let's dispense with the elephant in the room: this fork looks, well, different. Yes, that's the polite way of putting it. It's weird for sure, and I still can't get used to the way the oversized carbon legs extend way out in front of the axle, making every bike I've seen it on look like it's been dropped from a great height, choppering out the fork. Sit behind it, however, and it looks reassuringly stout.

If you've got this far you're not interested in how the Trust fork looks; you want to know how it rides. First up, it's very sensitive off the top. That initial touch is totally friction-free, making it incredibly sensitive to small bumps. This is more impressive still when you realise that the negative spring volume isn't very large. In fact, the fork appears to use a hydraulic top-out, to eliminate any knocking that would normally go hand in hand with such a set-up.

Getting a ballpark setting for the air pressure couldn't be more straightforward. Flip open the rubber

Travel dial makes setting the sag a cinch



covers on each leg, unscrew the valve caps with an Allen key, attach a shock pump and inflate to your body weight in lbs. So for me at 85kg, that's 187lb which is 187psi in each leg. I found that lower pressures and more sag definitely offered a more sensitive response, probably due to the small negative spring volume, but to get the support I craved, I needed to add volume spacers. Easier said than done.

The fork comes stock with volume spacers in each air-spring assembly, but you actually need to unbolt the linkage



Quick to react and slow to return makes the Shout a frustrating proposition

and remove the spring assembly from each leg to add more. Once dismantled, it's the same process as any other fork and, to be fair, it's a time-consuming operation rather than a difficult one.

With the spring rate and progression sorted, my focus instantly switched to the damping. And much to my surprise, the fork wasn't returning fast enough even with the rebound fully open. As I mentioned earlier, I weigh 85kg in my riding kit, so if you're lighter than me, this fork is going to suck the life out of your ride. I'm also convinced it is why my hands were fatiguing on longer runs. Hand or arm pump is not something I normally suffer from, but I'm convinced that the extra pulling force that I was exerting on the bar was making my hands ache. As the fork isn't stiff torsionally, I was constantly fighting the steering or, lack of it.

Yes, the Shout has good fore-aft stiffness, thanks to the oversized carbon upper legs and one-piece steerer assembly. But, just like a telescopic upside-down fork, there's a delay in



For maximum stiffness, we'd recommend running a a Torque Cap-compatible hub



Front the front, it could almost be a regular fork...



Rebound adjuster dial is housed at the base of the right leg



Allen-key adjusted thru-shaft damper

SPECIFICATION

Material Full carbon chassis, steerer tube and linkages

Travel 178mm trailing multi-link design

Axle to crown 580mm

Weight 2.23kg (4.92lb)

Wheel size 29in (also takes 27.5in)

Adjustments Three-way mode adjust – Firm, Mid, Open

Damping Trust engineered twin-tube, thru-shaft damper, with high and low-speed rebound and low-speed compression adjustment

Easy set-up with air pressure equal to rider weight

Max tyre widths 29x2.6in, 27.5x2.8in

Axle spacing Boost 15x110mm thru-axle and Torque Cap-compatible

Brake mount Direct 180mm rotor (203mm max)

Fits existing mountain bikes with tapered head tubes

transmitting input at the handlebar to the contact patch of the tyre and vice versa. And while some flex is necessary for off-camber traction and control, I think it's excessive on the Trust fork.

I've ridden this fork on a variety of different bikes with different wheel sizes, and the best option was a stiffer 27.5in wheel with a hub sporting oversized Torque Caps. Which isn't really a surprise, given the flex.

Also, after riding it on faster, rougher trails that really load up the fork, I'm convinced that being able to run the rebound faster may reduce control rather than improve it.

Critical as this First Ride sounds, I should qualify it by saying that Trust isn't the first brand to get it wrong and it's unlikely to be the last. The first Fox forks were totally over-damped, and more recently even RockShox updated the range of high-speed compression adjustment on its RC2 damper after just one year. Öhlins, Specialized, Bos – all brands that have promised the world and failed to deliver.

So the important lesson here is that now the Trust fork is in the hands of everyday riders, it needs to adapt its range of adjustment to make it suit a wider range of rider weights and styles. I'll try to get the rebound damping re-tuned before doing a full review, but until then I won't be taking the RockShox Lyrik Ultimate off my favourite bike.

Alan Muldoon

mbr 1ST IMPRESSION



HIGHS

Low breakaway force and impressive small-bump sensitivity. Great square-edge performance and fore-aft stiffness. No quirky anti-dive traits. Distinct looks.



LOWS

Over-damped on rebound. Lacks torsional stiffness and steering precision. Costs a pretty penny. Distinct looks.





Vitus's new trail bike range delivers an impressive package for the price

VITUS MYTHIQUE 29 VRX

£1,599.99 / 29in / vitusbikes.com

NEED TO KNOW

- New range of affordable 140mm full-suspension trail bikes from the hardtail kings
- A Marzocchi Bomber Z2 fork is paired with a RockShox Monarch R shock for a cool, calculated suspension response
- All models available with 27.5in or 29in wheels
- Entry-level VR models start at £1,249 and have 10mm less travel

Vitus's new trail bike is right on the money but how can the Mythique survive the reality?

If the new Vitus Mythique looks familiar, it's probably because it shares the same battleship grey finish, bright red Marzocchi Bomber fork and most of its build kit with the popular Sentier VR hardtail we featured in Editor's Choice.

Alternatively, it could be the angular lines the Mythique derives from its full-suspension sibling, the Vitus Escarpe, that grabbed your attention. Either way, the Mythique 29 VRX is the flagship bike in a new range of full-susseres that are designed to blow your mind, not your budget. And by top end we mean £1,599.99 for the VRX model featured here. Impressive, given the specification and the fact that most brands struggle to deliver a frame and shock, let alone a complete bike, for this kind of money.

More impressive still is that you have the choice of 29in or 27.5in wheels at each of the three price points.

All three bikes offer a choice of 29in or 27.5in wheels

Regardless of wheel size, travel on the top two models is 140mm front and rear, where the entry-level Mythique VRs get 10mm less at both ends.

And it's not just the angular profile that the new Mythique shares with the more expensive Escarpe, it also gets its superbly sensitive suspension. So even though it doesn't benefit from the pierced seat tube and floating shock design of its more expensive stablemate, it's still a four-bar design and has that pitter-patter response to the 140mm rear end. A dialled shock tune also makes it a set-and-forget affair, but you do need to tweak the saddle position to get the most from this bike on the climbs, which we'll get to in a minute.

Sensitive suspension however, isn't the only personality trait that the Mythique has inherited from the Escarpe. Less desirable attributes are the elevated BB height and limited seatpost insertion, both of which need addressing separately.

Let's look at seatpost insertion first. To get the reach I wanted, I needed to be on the size large, and at 5ft 11in that's obviously the correct size bike for anyone my height or thereabouts.

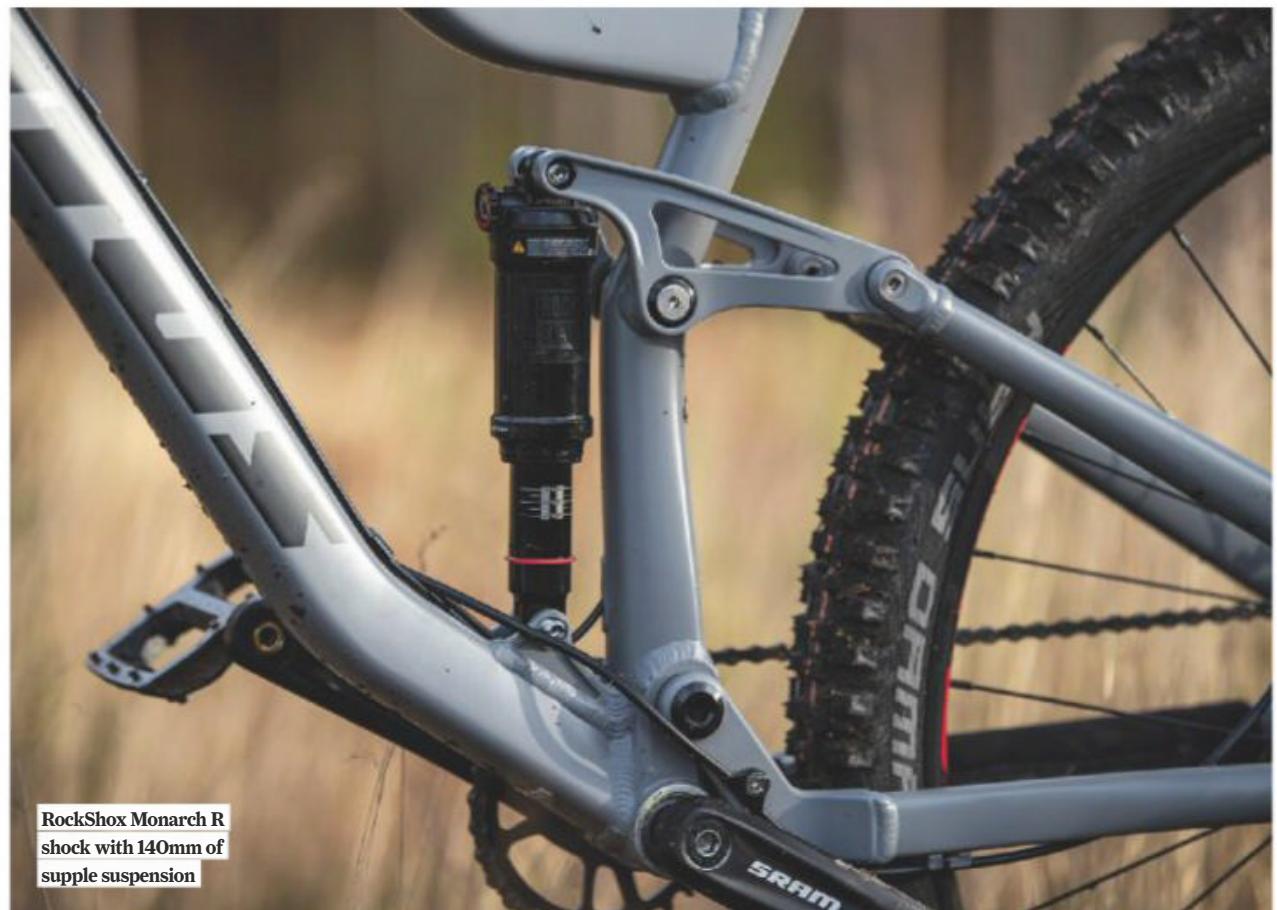


Slamming the saddle is a sticking plaster for slack seat angle

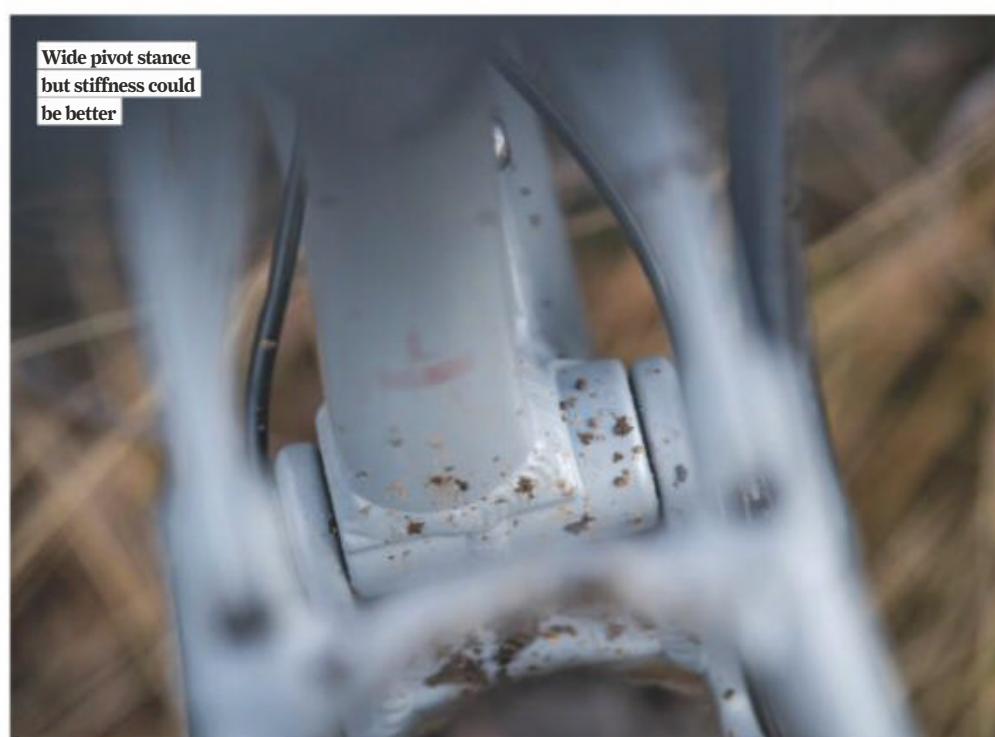


I'm convinced the 27.5 version is the one to go for

The thing is, I have relatively long legs and I still couldn't get the seatpost low enough in the frame without it interfering with the function of the dropper-post mechanism. Having less of a kinked seat tube would probably be enough to fix this, an added benefit being that it would also steepen up the seat tube angle and stop me having to run the saddle slammed all of the way forward on the head of the post to avoid being too far behind the BB on the climbs. This is the tweak I was referring to earlier, as it really helps stop the rear suspension from squatting too much when climbing sat down.



RockShox Monarch R
shock with 140mm of
supple suspension



Wide pivot stance
but stiffness could
be better

Now let's take a closer look at the BB height. Measured in the **mbr** workshop, it sits 347mm from the floor, a height you'd more likely find on a 170mm-travel enduro bike, not a trail bike with 140mm travel and considerably less sag. Thankfully, the dynamic ride height of the Mythique 29 isn't as high as the number suggests, so the bike actually feels good on rolling flowing singletrack, where the balanced suspension, generous sizing and relatively slack head angle make it a fun, fast and engaging ride.

Get it on anything steep, up or down, however, and the tipping effect of being perched on the bike, rather than sat in it, becomes that much more pronounced and unsettling. Start to push the Mythique in these situations and you quickly discover that the bike doesn't feel stiff enough to be ridden as hard as the slack head angle, long wheelbase and superb suspension encourage. At least the hard-compound Schwalbe tyres act as an early warning device, so you'll hear them ping and pop off roots

and rocks long before the suspension gets you in over your head.

So the new Vitus Mythique 29 VRX didn't fully live up to expectations, but all is not lost. The more compact frame design and smaller wheels on the 27.5in version should make it markedly stiffer, and looking at the geometry chart on the Vitus website it's 10mm lower too, so I'm convinced that's the one to go for. The only way to verify that though is to test one, so watch this space.

Alan Muldoon



1ST IMPRESSION



HIGHS

Great suspension and competitive pricing. Dialled cockpit.

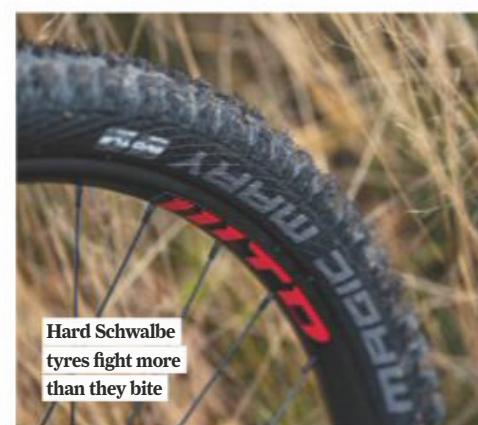


LOWS

BB height is too high. Seatpost doesn't go far enough into the frame. Hard-compound Schwalbe tyres lack grip.



Shimano brakes are paired
with a SRAM drivetrain



Hard Schwalbe
tyres fight more
than they bite

SPECIFICATION

Frame 6061-T6 aluminium, 140mm travel

Shock RockShox Monarch R

Fork Marzocchi Bomber Z2, 140mm travel

Wheels Vitus sealed hubs, WTB ST i30 rims, Schwalbe Magic Mary/Hans Dampf Performance 27.5x2.35in tyres

Drivetrain SRAM SX 32t chainset, SRAM SX Eagle 12-speed r-mech and shifter

Brakes Shimano MT501, 180mm

Components Nukeproof Neutron 800mm bar, Neutron 45mm stem, Brand-X Ascend 150mm post, Neutron saddle

Sizes S, M, L XL

Weight 15.28kg (33.69lb)

GEOMETRY

Size ridden L

Rider height 5ft 11in

Head angle 66°

Seat angle 66.9°

BB height 347mm

Chainstay 442mm

Front centre 782mm

Wheelbase 1,224mm

Down tube 739mm

Top tube 621mm

Reach 465mm



MERIDA EONE-FORTY 9000

£7,000 / 29-27.5in / merida-bikes.com

NEED TO KNOW

- Short-travel e-bike with 133mm travel rear and 140mm-travel fork
- Full carbon frame, internal 504Wh battery and Shimano E8000 motor
- Trail bike ethos, designed to be fun and manoeuvrable, with climbing prowess
- More conservative geometry than the burlier eOne-Sixty, but it gets mullet wheels
- Three-bike range from £4,350

The eOne-Sixty's short-travel stablemate has features aplenty but will its less aggressive geometry help or hinder out on the trails?

Just like pure aerobically-powered bikes, e-bikes are designed with a specific kind of riding in mind. Take the Specialized Turbo Kenevo: it has a dual-crown fork and a 'shuttle mode', and is unashamedly aimed at bike park bombing. The YT Decoy we featured last month works best on big, all-mountain trails because the frame is stiff and the suspension progressive. The Merida eOne-Forty here is most definitely a trail bike, which means it's comfortable, fun and manoeuvrable, and totally suited to the kind of terrain most of us ride.

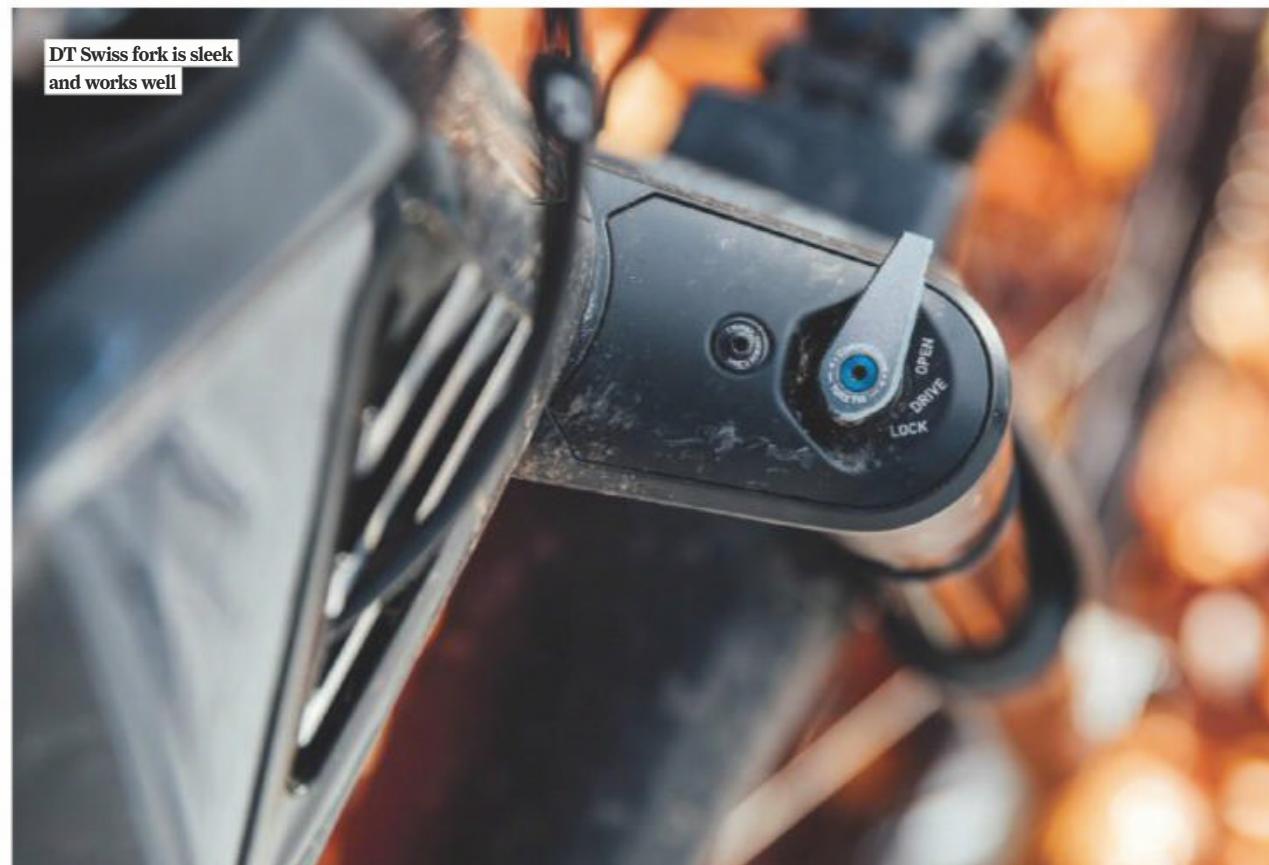
Merida's eOne-Forty is the little sibling to the well-known eOne-Sixty, and gets the same facelift, with the battery now hidden away inside the down tube. It shares the same frame design and styling too, albeit with 27mm less travel. It's also more compact, with a 10mm shorter reach and a 1° steeper head angle. Merida says this makes the bike better at slow speeds and when climbing.

Merida's definition of trail riding is obviously different from mine, as I want to have maximum confidence and control when I'm riding down any kind of trail, and that comes from long, low and slack geometry. I'd rather Merida had retained the eOne-Sixty's geometry, which incidentally might even have helped the bike climb, as it has a longer overall wheelbase and more generous reach. As such, at 6ft 1in I would definitely upsize to an XL frame.

The frame in question is easy on the eye, with sculpted carbon mated to an alloy rear end. And Merida claims those distinctive vents you see behind the head tube aren't just for show; they really help cool the motor and battery, as well as doubling as internal cable routing ports. I think they look tacky, but plenty of people seem to like them.

It boasts some other interesting features too, some of which I like, some I don't. The on/off button looks great inset in the top tube, but you have to push it hard to get it to work. The battery cover feels robust, but it's only

It's comfortable, manoeuvrable and fun to ride





eOne-Forty: efficient but could be a little less uptight



secured with a rubber O-ring, which has stretched over the 500-mile life of this particular demo bike and doesn't fit snugly anymore. No matter, Merida has designed the O-rings to be replaceable, so you can always get a rattle-free fit. You can take the 504Wh battery out and charge it off the bike; the release mechanism is ingenious because you use the bolt-thru lever from the rear axle to unlock it. You can also charge the battery in the bike, although the charge port is located on top of the BB housing, meaning it was full of water every time I went to use it. Finally, there's a headset block to restrict the controls from hitting the top tube in a crash, and the chainstay protector does a great job at keeping the bike silent.

Merida has stuck with the Shimano STEPS E8000 motor, despite the popularity of the new Bosch unit. I've always been a fan of the Japanese system for its smooth operation and reliability, but I have to admit it is



now outclassed by its German rival. Considering this 9000 model costs £7,000, it's facing some pretty hefty competition when it comes to power, refinement and battery capacity.

HOW IT RIDES

The eOne-Forty has gone full gangster, decked out in matt black with subtle



SPECIFICATION

Frame Carbon/6016 alloy, 153mm travel

Shock Fox Float Performance Elite

Fork DT Swiss F535 One, 140mm travel

Motor Shimano STEPS E8000, 250W

Battery Shimano E8035, 504Wh

Display Shimano E8000

Wheels DT Swiss Spline HX1501 ONE 30 Boost, Maxxis Minion DHF/DHR II 29x2.5in/27.5x2.6in tyres

Drivetrain Shimano XT crankset, r-mech and 12-speed shifter

Brakes Shimano XT four-piston, 203mm

Components Merida Expert eTR 780mm bar, Merida 35mm stem, Merida 170mm post, Merida Expert CC saddle

Sizes S, M, L, XL, XXL

Weight 22.2kg (48.94lb)

GEOMETRY

Size ridden L

Rider height 6ft 1in

Head angle 66.1°

Seat angle 72.1°

BB height 332mm

Chainstay 438mm

Front centre 767mm

Wheelbase 1,205mm

Down tube 726mm

Top tube 603mm

Reach 450mm

graphics, but it is approachable and friendly to ride — fluoro orange would better reflect its personality. A combination of the linear shock tune and short 438mm back end help make the bike easy to manual, and this contributes to a feeling of agility. I'd say it did a good job of flattering my skills.

The mullet wheel set-up is a popular with e-bikes and the eOne-Forty makes good use of it: the 29in Maxxis Minion DHF tyre up front grips without being draggy, while the slightly wider but smaller 27.5in DHR II helps the bike react willingly to changes in direction.

The flattery came to an end when I pushed the bike harder and faster, or on rougher trails, where the eOne-Forty ripped through its travel and left me at the mercy of its relatively conservative geometry. The flexy back feels good on the slow, muddy and natural trails we have in abundance all over the UK right now, dishing out grip where I hadn't expected to find it, but on firmer, faster

trails with berms and jumps it felt a little more vague and less trustworthy.

If you're in the market for an enduro e-bike that can hammer fast, steep and rough trails, this is not the bike for you. But if your idea of fun is sliding around in the woods on natural trails, searching for grip, and riding for pure kicks, then the eOne-Forty does a great job, albeit at a hefty price tag.

Jamie Darlow

mbr 1ST IMPRESSION

HIGHS

Fun and exciting ride, easy to play with on the trail, proven Shimano motor, and boasting loads of smart features.

LOWS

Too flexible when trails get faster and firmer, geometry is needlessly conservative. Too pricey.





NORCO SIGHT A2 29

£2,995/ 29in / evanscycles.com

NEED TO KNOW

- New 150mm-travel Sight platform with 29in wheels
- Long and low geometry with increased reach and slacker head angle
- Shorter seat tube on all sizes allows longer dropper post fitment
- Powerful Code R disc brakes with 200/180mm rotors boost stopping power

Will increased wheel size and travel equate to more fun on the new Norco Sight?

This is the new Norco Sight A2 29, and the big change this year is the switch to 29in wheels. Travel has also increased, the latest version getting a 160mm-travel fork and 150mm out back. Price-wise, the alloy A2 29 featured here is pretty competitive, but if you want to spend more (or less), there is an A1 above it and a A3 bike below, and if money is no object, there are also two carbon bikes, called the C1 and C2. Most models are available in a women's build and also come as an option with 27.5in wheels.

To keep the price competitive, Norco fits a second-string Performance series Fox 36 fork and a Float X2 rear shock to the Sight A2 29. These feel totally in-keeping with the new aggressive all-mountain attitude, but the rear suspension did feel a little lifeless. I'm

not sure if this is the shock tune or just that the bike needs more time to bed in.

Size-wise, the Sight A2 29 is available in four options, and to keep the handling consistent they all get size-specific chainstays (430mm small, 435mm, 440mm large and 445mm extra large). Norco also fits size-specific dropper posts — there's a 150mm on the small frame size, 170mm on the medium and large and a whopping 200mm on the XL.

In-keeping with the refocused Sight, Norco has updated the geometry. With its 64° head angle and a long 1,250mm wheelbase, the Sight A2 29 feels incredibly planted and confidence-inspiring on fast, gnarly terrain. Drop the saddle, point it downhill and this bike is literally out of sight.

The effective seat tube angle is around 77° and this puts you in a great position for keeping on top of the gear and the front wheel down on the climbs too; just don't expect to set any hill-climb KOMs on this bike. And that's primarily because the Sight A2 29 isn't particularly light — the hefty frame, entry-level components and budget SRAM NX Eagle drivetrain are really punishing on the scales. Thankfully, the Sight doesn't ride heavy, but it's not a lithe or agile bike either.

So it's clear that Norco has got the basics right, but it's also sweated the details — like the extra frame protection on the underside of the down tube, a proper water bottle mount, a secondary





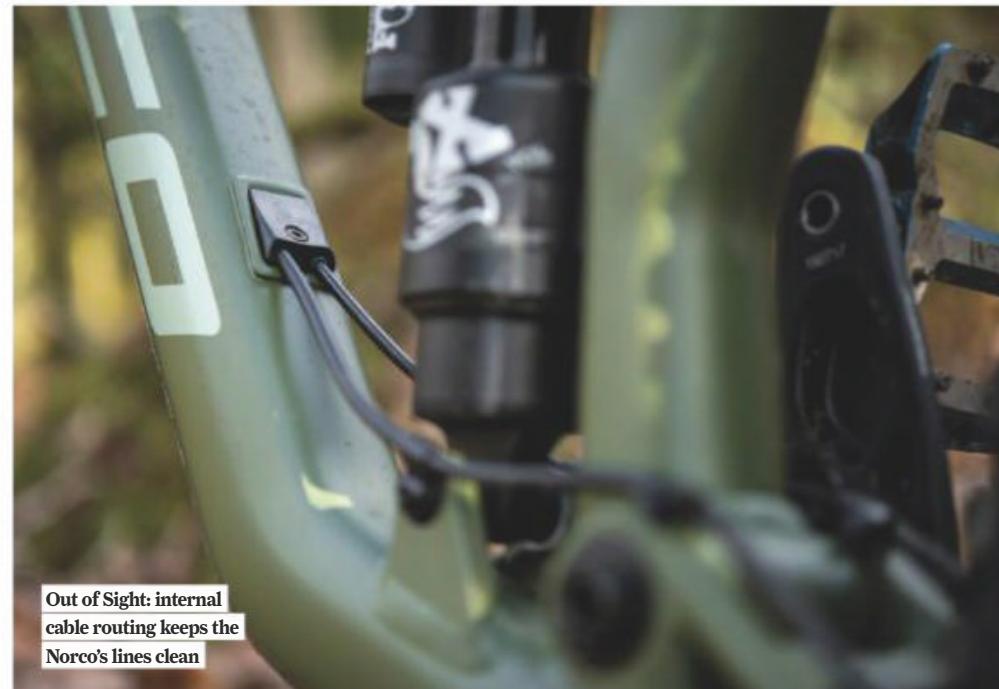
fitting for tube/tool carry under the top tube, easy access internal cable routing, stiff rocker link, mini ISCG chain device and vast rear tyre and standover clearance.

HOW IT RIDES

Fettling is par for the course with any new bike, but setting up the Norco was easy, and this is because the company has just launched a new web-based app called Ride Aligned that helps simplify suspension set-up. Obviously, this isn't a new idea but Norco's system is skill-centred and not just based on body weight, so the more skilful or fast you are, the firmer the suspension settings.

When I tapped my details into the app I got back fork and shock pressures, damping settings, tyre pressures and even a recommended bar width and bar height. I used the suspension and tyre pressure guidelines on my first ride, but to be honest I didn't chop the 800mm bar down or run extra spacers under the stem, simply because I like a wide bar, and with the conical spacer on top of the headset my hands were already too high.

There are a couple of things I would change though — I'd swap the 60a



Out of Sight: internal cable routing keeps the Norco's lines clean

Minion DHR II front tyre for the softer compound Maxx Terra 3C option and I'd maybe add a thicker Double Down casing tyre to the rear, just because you're going to be slamming that rear end into a lot of nasty stuff. I'd also upgrade the inner cable in the dropper post because the stock one is sticky, causing the remote to jam open a few times. The grips need to go too — sure they have a nice profile and texture, but they're way too hard.

Despite some minor concerns with the spec, the Sight A2 29 is still excellent value. It's not lightweight or the quickest uphill, but if you're looking for an aggressive all-mountain bike to take to somewhere like BikePark Wales,

the Norco Sight A2 29 is an absolute shredder. And with Norco's Ride Aligned app easing set-up, that adrenaline rush is also going to come sooner than you think.

Paul Burwell

mbr 1ST IMPRESSION

HIGHS

Size-specific geometry and dropper post, excellent value for money and a breeze to set up

LOWS

Hard grips, 60a front tyre and packing quite a few extra pounds

SPECIFICATION

Frame Sight aluminium, 150mm travel

Shock Fox X2 Performance

Fork Fox 36 Rhythm, 160mm travel

Wheels DT Swiss 370 hubs, Stans Flow rims, Maxxis DHR II WT EXO TR 29x2.4in tyres

Drivetrain SRAM Descendant 6K 32t chainset, NX Eagle shifter and r-mech

Brakes SRAM Code R, 200/180mm

Components Norco 800mm bar, Norco 40mm stem, TransX 170mm post, WTB Volt 250 Sport saddle

Sizes S, M, L, XL

Weight 16.7kg (36.82lb)

GEOMETRY

Size ridden L

Rider Height 5ft 10in

Head angle 64.6°

Seat angle 72.8°

BB height 350mm

Chainstay 445mm

Front centre 805mm

Wheelbase 1,250mm

Down Tube 745mm

Top tube 621mm

Reach 485mm

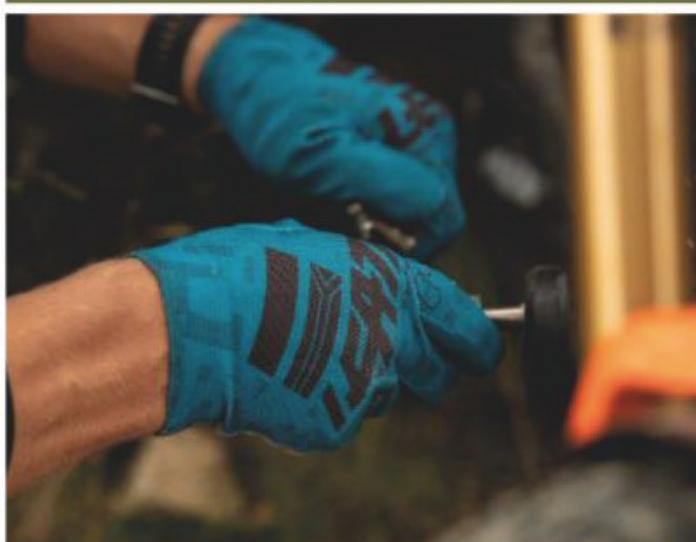
Norco's new app helps simplify the set-up



SUPERFOXY

The Mondraker SuperFoxy leaves you with no excuse not to nail that sketchy line, hit that scary gap or smash a PB on your favourite enduro trail. Featuring World Cup proven Forward Geometry, a 160 mm Zero Suspension platform, full high-grade Stealth Carbon frame and 29" wheels the SuperFoxy is ready to take your riding to the next level.

Put simply, the SuperFoxy is the ultimate enduro tool. Go up, go down and then repeat.



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One year subscription rates (13 issues, priority mail) UK £68.85; Europe €144; USA \$184.85; rest of world £123.55

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Back issues mags-uk.com/browse-by-publisher/ti-media.html
 01795 662976 (9.30am-1.30pm Mon - Fri)

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© TI Media Ltd 2019 ISSN 1367 0824.
 Printed by Walstead UK Limited. Registered at the Post Office as a newspaper.

mbr is published 13 times a year on every fourth Wednesday.
 If you have trouble finding an issue at your newsagents, please call Distribution on 020 3148 3333.

mbr incorporating Mountain Biker International, Bicycle Magazine, Performance Cyclist and The Bike Mag, a part of TI Media Ltd, is published 13 times a year on every fourth Wednesday of each month by TI Media Ltd, 161 Marsh Wall, London E14 9AA.

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 Regulated

YOUR LETTERS

Mailbox

★ STAR LETTER ★

IN KNEED OF HELP

Help please if you can. I have just had a total left knee replacement and want to carry on riding. I ride trails on an eMTB, not DH or bike parks. What kneepads do you think would be best for me? I feel I will need some side protection as well as front, and they must be comfortable for all-day riding. I have looked online at dozens of different pads and am getting more and more confused. Any help you can give will be gratefully accepted.

Terry Jones

Ed — Hi Terry, you've come to the right place. Like everyone, you want maximum protection for minimum bulk, and happily these kind of pads have come on enormously over the past few years thanks to the demands of enduro racing. Check out all our reviews at po.st/kneepads, or you can't go far wrong with the Race Face Ambush pad.



Race Face Ambush:
great all-round kneepad
for trail riders



Full beam, low cost:
this light means
serious business

DIY LIGHTS

Inspired by your lights feature, I decided to give my own a go: 12V LED light bar £6.99; Switch £5; Lipo 12V battery £18. Will see how it goes, thanks for the inspiration.

Darren Woodhead

CYCLING SUPPORT

I have just read the star letter from Chris Jones [MTB Missionaries, January 2020]. I am a 67-year-old still very active mountain biker living in Plymouth and have ridden off-road for the last 55

years. Anyway, I am a member of Cycling UK and although I am not involved in anything at the moment, I know they actively encourage the promotion of cycling clubs in any discipline. They can provide advice, information and help at any level. This is an extract from their website: "Cycling UK Development Officers work with clubs to establish and increase the club's skills, capacity and confidence. This helps ensure activities are led to a high standard by safe and qualified leaders and can better engage with a wider audience."

"Cycling UK has established over 200 new and diverse clubs across England and Scotland which have engaged over 50,000 people. Community hubs, faith groups, mental health support groups and organisations are just some of the settings where Community Cycle Clubs are taking place."

I am not sure if Chris would be interested in looking down this avenue, but I would be willing to contact Cycling UK and find out more. I would also be willing to help where I can. I have not done anything like this before so it would all be new.

John Woolley

HELMET HELP

I write to you seeking help! I am having a terrible time finding a mountain biking helmet that is full-face with a removable chinbar in an XL size. I recently had a pretty good fall in which I was concussed and cut my face up pretty good so I want more protection for certain rides but don't want the chinbar on for easy trail rides. I ordered the Bell Super DH MIPS in a large and it was just a bit too small. I want a helmet with the MIPS technology.

What are my options? Are there certain brands, in your experience of reviewing helmets, that run bigger than



Sweet Protection
Arbitrator: lid to
please big heads

Bell in a size large that may work for me? I've checked multiple company sites and done a number of Google searches and nothing seems to fit my criteria.

Any help is greatly appreciated!
Thank you,

Gary Mahoney

Ed — Gary have you been hacking our servers? It's almost as if you knew we had a bumper enduro helmet test in this issue. For the full test, head over to

page 84, but to cut to the chase, Sweet Protection's Arbitrator has a removable chinbar and comes in an XL size. Could be just what you've been looking for.

NICE OUT

Sleddale, North Yorkshire, Sunday December 15. How good does winter look here? The riders are Jon Reaman, Simon Hailes, Andy Bainbridge, Johnny Johnson.

Paul Whittle

mbr NEXT MONTH**29 ENDURO BIKES**

Serious bikes for serious terrain on test, including the Specialized S-Works Enduro 29, Pivot Firebird 29 and Giant Reign Advanced 29

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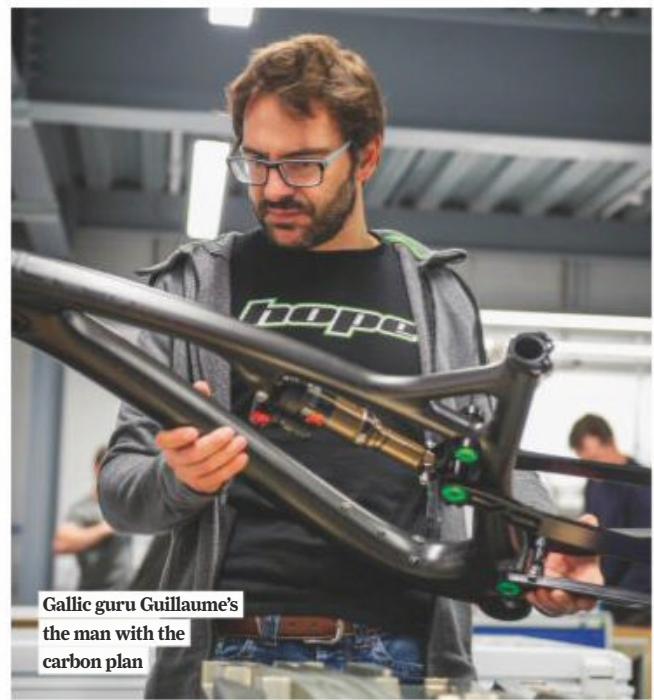


BEST OF BRITISH HOPE TECHNOLOGY

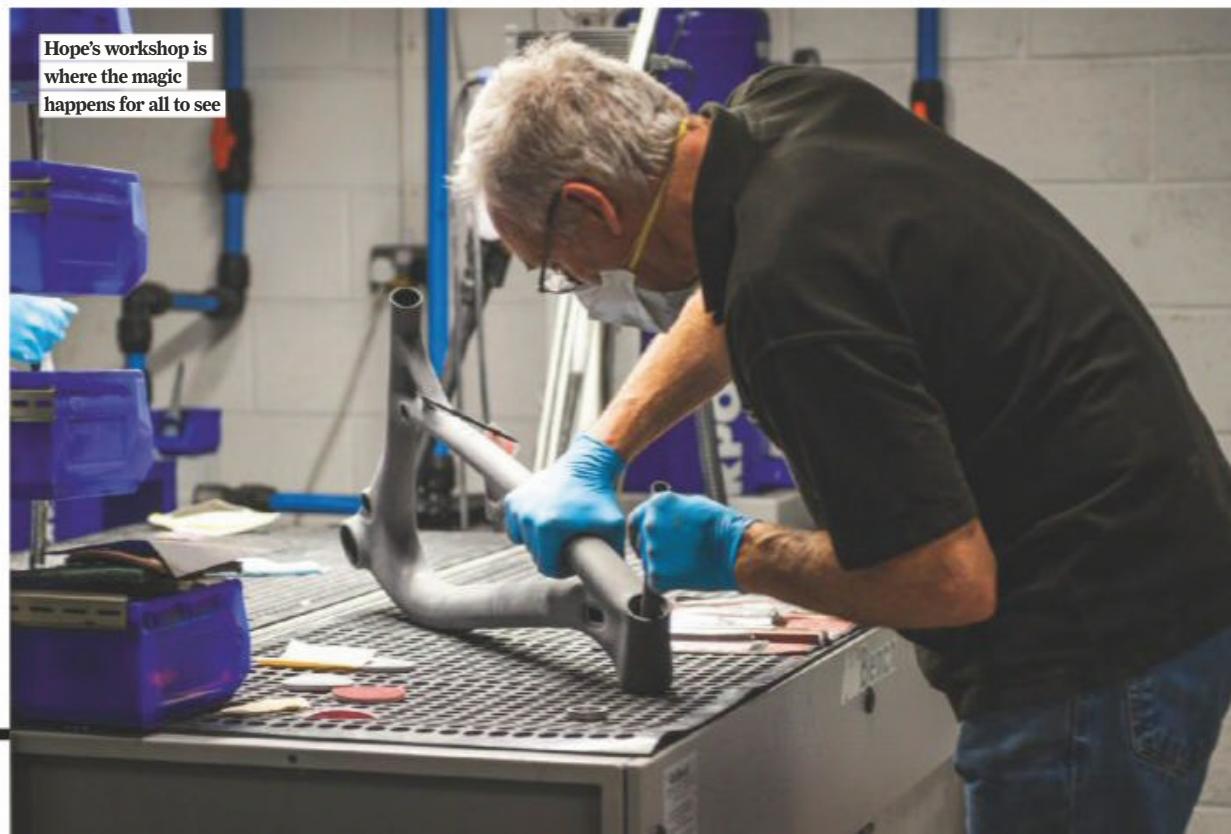
The HB.130 is the realisation of a dream for Hope's founders. We head to Lancashire in order to find out the story behind this ambitious project

Words & photos: Sim Mainey





Gallic guru Guillaume's
the man with the
carbon plan



Hope's workshop is
where the magic
happens for all to see



Even straight out of the mould, the HB frames are a thing of beauty



O

ne wall of Hope's meeting room is fully glazed. The smartly appointed mezzanine looks out across the workshop floor and rows of machines, the double glazing blocking out the noise and giving the scene a strange serenity. These large anonymous looking machines run around the clock turning steel and aluminium into bicycle components with high-speed precision. Working with metal has a reputation for being grim and grimy but here it's light, airy and almost suspiciously clean. This is cutting-edge manufacturing.

Hope is one of the UK cycling industry's great success stories. Over its 30-year history, Hope has forged — or rather machined — a reputation for pragmatic, robust design combined with colourful anodised flare. For this reason, and many others, it has earned itself something of a soft spot in the hearts of British riders. In turn it has never been afraid to wear its heart on its sleeve — the fact that its workshop is on view to visitors is proof that it's proud, not just of what it makes, but how it goes about making it.

Pride of place in front of the reception room's window is Hope's latest bike — the HB.T track bike. Designed in collaboration with Lotus Engineering and the Great Britain Cycling Team, the HB.T has been designed with the goal of bringing Olympic medals back from the 2020 Tokyo games. It's a stunning bike, with a mantis-like design constructed from 3D printed alloy and composites.

But it's Hope's facility with carbon, rather than its metallurgical knowledge, that has lead to its involvement in the project. Olympic success or not, it will look incredible in action, especially on the velodrome Hope is planning to build just over the hill in its hometown of Barnoldswick. That's right, this is a company not short on ambition.

For Hope's founders, the move into frame building was born from the simple desire to ➔

ABOUT THIS SERIES

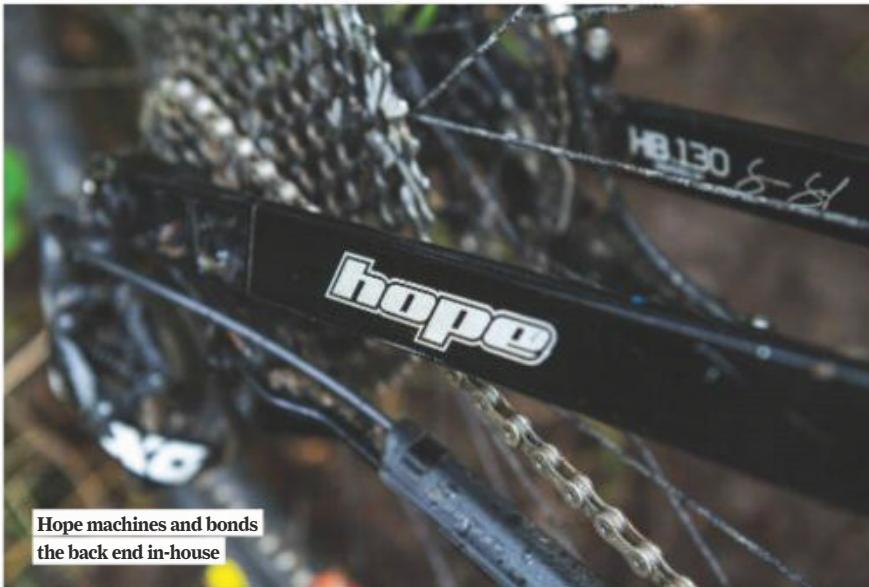
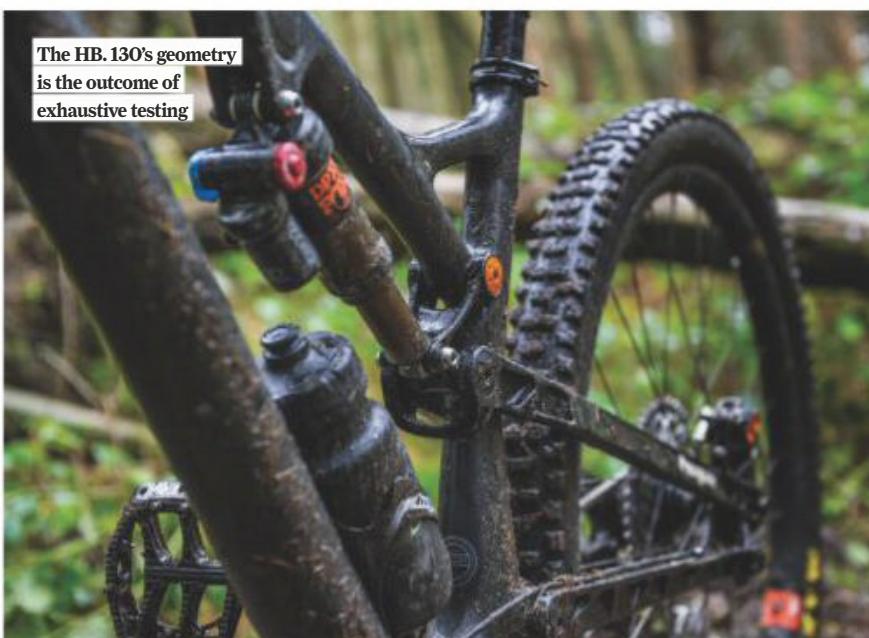
The UK is a world leader in mountain bike design. We boast a proud engineering heritage and a stoic pragmatism that has forged a reputation for timeless, practical design. At the same time we are open-minded and innovative, unafraid of pushing boundaries and reluctant to rest on our laurels. From enthusiasts tinkering in sheds to large-scale engineering firms, we are a nation of thinkers and doers, a point evidenced by the number of bike brands that call the UK home.

We've more than just curiosity and engineering know-how to thank for this though; the geography of the British Isles has played an equally important role in influencing the design of our bikes. In this series we're going behind the scenes at leading UK brands and exploring the trails that have influenced their design decisions. We'll be asking if there is one trail that informed a bike's design, whether a particular section of a ride led to a eureka moment and how Britain's landscape has shaped the bikes we ride today.



A wide-angle photograph of a mountain biker riding a trail through a dense forest. The biker is positioned in the upper center of the frame, moving away from the viewer. The trail is a dirt path winding through tall evergreen trees. The ground is covered in green moss and fallen pine needles. The lighting is natural, filtering through the tree canopy.

THE GEOMETRY
WAS UPDATED
THREE TIMES
BEFORE HOPE
WAS HAPPY



make a bike for themselves and to have something unique to hang their components on. When faced with a blank sheet of paper, and with the ability to machine components to suit in-house, Hope saw an opportunity to innovate and do things its own way. Arguably it was the company's co-founder, the late Simon Sharp, who was the driving force of this project, but the man charged with designing the first bike, and every subsequent model, is Guillaume Leon. Guillaume has worked for Hope since 2002, but now lives and works in Briançon in his native France, travelling back to the UK as and when needed. After 17 years of working in Barnoldswick, there's an unmistakable Lancastrian twang to his French accent, adding a *je ne sais quoi* to his already affable personality.

Today he is busy torture testing brakes on a dyno, watching as numbers slowly change on the computer that is monitoring the exercise, and the brake disc starts to glow. As a designer and engineer he'd spent his spare time playing with ideas of what an entirely Hope-built bike might look like. He'd drawn sketches and built models of what he thought might work, so when the time came to actually make a frame, Guillaume was the man for the job.

The first bike — the HB.211 — was a 160mm-travel, 27.5in-wheeled enduro bike. It was meant to be for internal use only — something for the race team and employees to ride. With a blank sheet of paper and enough engineering power to comfortably disregard, or work around, industry standards, Hope was able to try new ideas, such as a slimline 130mm custom hub spacing, bespoke crank and BB interface, a motorcycle-inspired radial rear brake mount and other clever touches. Probably the biggest talking point was the carbon mainframe. For a company best known for working with metal, this seemed an odd choice, but for Hope it was the obvious way forward.

Despite a factory full of CNC machines and three decades of working with aluminium, Hope didn't have any real background with welding. But with the tooling and the ability to machine a mould from a slab of metal, creating a carbon frame was both easier and cheaper. And Hope did in fact have some experience with carbon prior to the HB, producing a limited number of bars and seatposts.

A NEW HOPE

Hope believed if it was going to create a bike, it had to do it properly. Producing a carbon frame requires quality at every step — in materials, tools and labour. So the corner of the factory that dealt with carbon was expanded, composite expert Chris Clarke was hired to oversee things, and staff and resources were allocated to make things happen.

When the production version of the HB.211 — the HB.160 — was finally offered to the public it was met with a mixed response. The looks, quality and attention to detail were undoubtedly there but, for what in most people's books was a cutting-edge super-bike, the geometry was a little behind the times. Guillaume acknowledges that the geometry had been one of the first aspects of the bike to be signed off. After that, the team had spent the majority of their time concentrating on the suspension design and, crucially, the manufacturing process. By the time the HB.160 went into production, the geometry that had been approved at the start of the project seemed dated. That's not to say it was bad — Guillaume says that the geometry works perfectly on his local trails in Briançon where things are tight and technical, but, call it fashion or progress, the HB.160's numbers weren't perceived to be as progressive as the bike could have been.

Progress and change don't stop, and even within Hope things had moved on. The Enduro race team was starting to be less of a priority and staff riders were looking for a bike better suited to the trails closer to home, rather than one designed for racing. The new breed of shorter-travel 29ers seemed to be what most riders, both in Hope and in the general market, seemed to be gravitating towards. Guillaume got to work.

With a lot of the frame manufacturing process in place, and lessons learned from developing the HB.160, there was more time to concentrate on the geometry of the new bike. A great deal of comparison testing was done, buying interesting bikes and giving them to staff to ride, creating a bank of feedback. Opinions were also gathered from outside the company to make sure they broke out of their echo chamber. The geometry of the new bike was updated three times before Hope was happy with it. The fourth iteration became the HB.130 — Hope's 29inch, 130mm-travel trail bike.

GISBURN FOREST

Gisburn Forest is half an hour's drive north of Hope. With Guillaume busy setting fire to brakes on his test rig, I'm being shown round by Doddy. Rob 'Doddy' Dodsworth is the HB brand manager. Responsible for sales, specs, customer service and a whole host of other things, he's understandably passionate about the bikes in his charge.

Hope has a strong association with the trails at Gisburn. The Hope Line trail is the most obvious tie, but the hugely successful Hopetech Women's Enduro race is held here and Hope is a strong supporter of the PMBA (Pennine Mountain Bike Association) race series which invariably uses Gisburn as a venue.

The forest is wearing Hope livery today — black cut through with vibrant green. In among



Project manager
Doddy blasts through
the green room



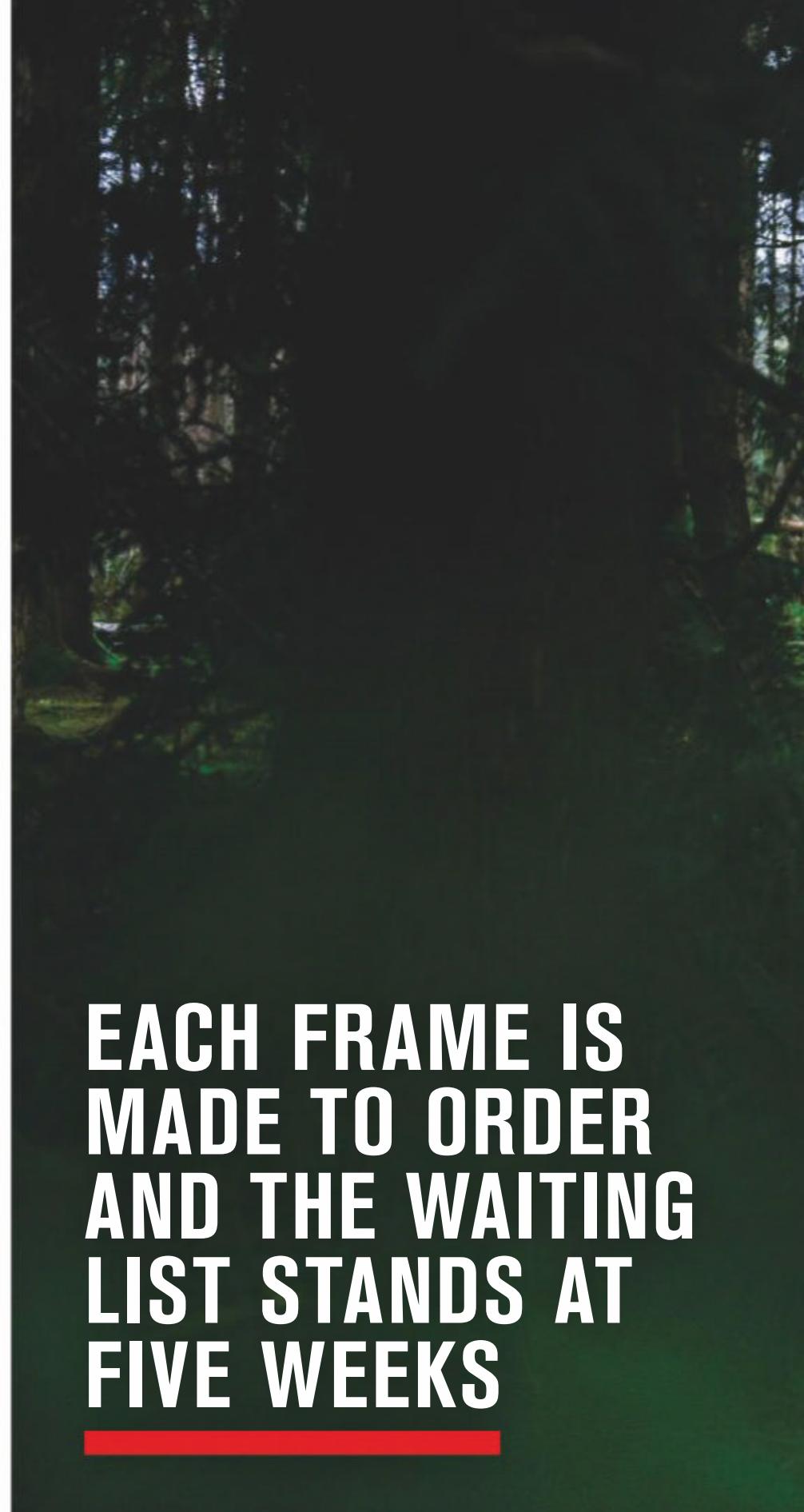
the dense darkness of the forest, pockets of light illuminate the moss that carpets the ground. The HB.130 was designed with a broad remit, but it feels very much at home here. Tight and twisty, the trail has little in the way of full-bore, wide-open sections. Lots of travel and a raked-out head angle aren't necessarily the key to going fast at Gisburn. Instead a more balanced, nuanced, approach is needed. Naturally for Lancashire in December it's raining. Builders brew-coloured puddles dot the trail, corners are started with a bow wave and exited with a hero splash. Water and traffic have laid down a beating in places, giving the man-made trails a more natural touch; 130mm of travel and 29-inch wheels feels just enough here.

The HB.130 uses the same suspension design as the HB.160 but with a little more anti-squat dialled into the kinematics, giving a zip to the bike that lends itself to accelerating from one corner to the next. Guillaume says he uses his HB.130 for rides below 1,000 metres and his HB.160 for anything above that. Bearing in mind where he lives, that should mean the HB.130 is fine for just about anything this country can throw its way.

CUSTOM OPTIONS

The weather-resistant trails lend a consistency that allows for solid comparative testing to be done, and it's also representative of the kind of riding many of us do. A lot of the bikes Hope brings in to test are lapped round the forest. But it's not all trail centre here. In among the dense woods are some off-piste sections — local-built trails and leftovers from various races. The good ones feel almost official; the raw dirt and roots in the corners the only giveaway that these are not built to a spec, more to a feel — much like the HB.130.

Steel and titanium frames have a reputation for possessing something special. 'Soul' sounds a bit



**EACH FRAME IS
MADE TO ORDER
AND THE WAITING
LIST STANDS AT
FIVE WEEKS**

hippy-dippy, but they are often perceived to have a character other materials can't match. To some people this is just guff, to others it's an important part of choosing a bike. Carbon has generally been overlooked by those looking for that 'something'. From a technological standpoint it's a wonder material, but one often associated with production-line bikes. There might be something in the Gisburn puddle water, but the HB.130 feels like a bike that has a bit more to it. Maybe it's the carbon layup, the fact it's been made by people I've looked in the eye, or just that it's to my liking, but the HB.130 has a definite personality to it. Sometimes it's those intangibles that make a bike feel special.

Despite the sizeable investment in producing the HBs, Doddy says there isn't pressure to hit targets and push sales. Hope is a component manufacturer first and foremost, and that's what brings in the money. With its current set-up it can only make five frames a week, each frame is made to order and the waiting list stands at five weeks.

Hope being Hope, HB buyers can customise their



bike to suit. One customer is having one side of their HB finished with silver components and the other side red. Why? Because they can. Every HB customer is given updates as their frame progresses from sheets of carbon through to final build, and when it's ready, it can be collected from the factory. It's an intensely personal affair, and although the frame might not be truly custom for each rider, each bike is certainly unique.

Low cloud snags on the tops of the trees and rain whips across our faces. There are a couple of vantage points that offer fine views over the forest and towards the Trough of Bowland, but we're avoiding them today. It's a day for hiding in the trees, even if this makes photography tricky. We explore some dirty but fun off-piste trails that straightline down the hill before wiggling through the trees. Claggy mud coats the frame, but the slim, angular stays shrug it off. The alloy subframe isn't welded, instead it uses a bonding process that is also used on the wings of an Airbus A380. This means that Hope can keep the assembly

in-house, but also means that there are fewer alignment issues.

Two riders join us at the top of the Hope Line. Both are on ex-Hope staff bikes and are understandably interested and enthusiastic about the HB.130. Well-built and supported products, along with plenty of homegrown pride, has made Hope part of the fabric of the UK riding scene; now that cloth has a carbon weave. The weather deteriorates further and after riding down the dark Hope Line by feel more than sight, we beat a retreat to the van.

Back at the factory a freshly built long-travel 29er from a large well known brand sits in reception. Another bike in for comparative testing and a hint at what's to come? Maybe. At Hope anything is possible.

Talk to the people behind the HB range and each is keen to stress it's a team effort, and not just one person's vision. Many minds have played a part in turning the HB project from idea to reality, proving it truly does take a factory to build a bike. **mbr**





SECRET SAUCE

Sometimes, the best trails are the ones your phone can't find

Words: Barney Marsh
Photos: James Vincent

am guilty of a great many things for which I feel a slight sense of shame. An overwhelming fondness for bed in the mornings — when my children are at their most hyperactive, and my wife is an early riser. Drinking too much coffee when I know I'll not be near a loo for the next hour. Conveniently using 'in a minute' to mean 'at some point in the next three weeks'. I know I'm not alone.

Unfortunately, among these vague embarrassments is laziness. Not necessarily from a 'physical activity' point of view (OK, OK, that too) — but laziness of thought. It's easy to get stuck in a rut and to not even realise it. It's easy to always eat the same thing for breakfast, go the same way to work every day, to ride the same trails over and over again. The ones from my doorstep, or the ones a 20-minute drive away. They're 'easy' because I know where I'm going, I don't have to look too hard, and even the technical stuff I know well enough that I can pucker and squeeze down most of it, and it's easy to congratulate myself that I've ridden it — when I couldn't ride it 10



Big skies and grassland singletrack are the gateways to old-school adventure

Even when you put your phone away it's difficult to get properly off-grid

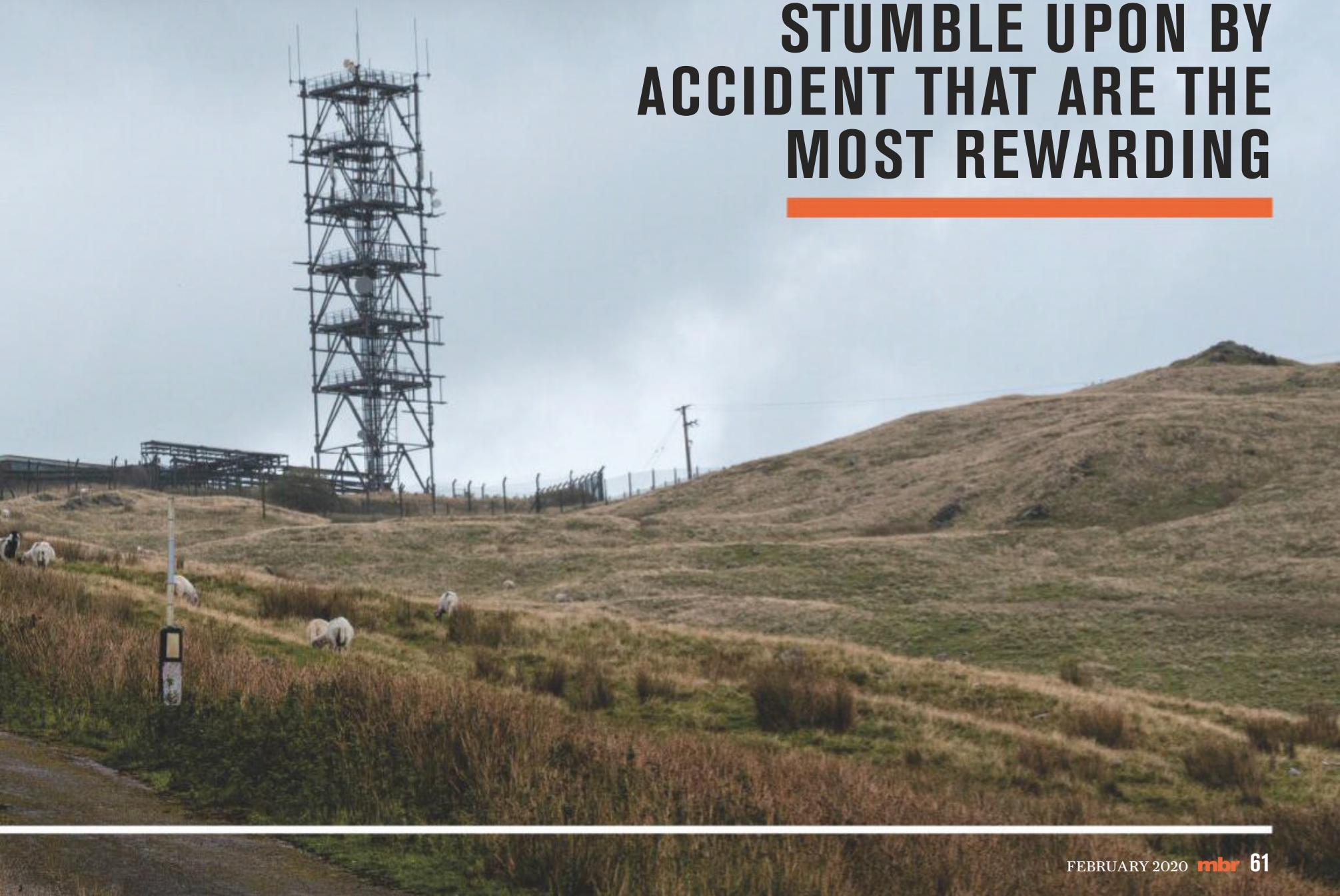


years ago. I should bloody hope so too, after 10 years of practice at the same bloody feature, when all that time and riding has probably eroded it a bit more anyway, and made it that much easier to ride.

And even when I *do* venture further afield to ride, it'll either be to trails I know, or places that I know contain awesome trails. And from there, it's a simple click and tap of my phone to find trails that other people I've never met have labelled 'awesome', or 'nadgery', or whatever. There may well be photos of the salient features. There might even be video. It's all very safe; it's all very easy.

And to an extent, it's even a bit isolating. Sure, there's always the shared camaraderie of riding trails with friends, and the euphoria that brings, but of actually 'discovering' them? Of not quite knowing what you're getting into? That secret thrill of finding something that's not on Strava, that no one knows about? The joy that your mate feels when they turn to you at the end of the run with the connection of something shared? That little (allowably selfish) delight of knowing something that your peers don't? Sure, I suppose there's an element of that to 'discovering' trails on the internet, but it's the ones that you stumble upon by accident, or that a mate shows ↗

IT'S THE TRAILS YOU STUMBLE UPON BY ACCIDENT THAT ARE THE MOST REWARDING



you, that are the most rewarding. And the more time goes by, the more I'm stuck in the same invisible ruts, and those joys become more infrequent. This isn't something it's easy to make a concerted effort to change, except to say that when the opportunity presents itself to experience new stuff with old mates, it should be grabbed with both hands.

And so, when James Vincent (a.k.a the Fresh Prince of Carlisle, photographer and occasional wearer of Extremely Short Shorts) called and exhorted me to ride a far-flung trail in the Lake District, I didn't really feel as if I could say no — not least because turning James down feels a bit like kicking a puppy. The precise location was something of a mystery, however. James had been waxing lyrical for ages about some new trail that he'd been shown, and he'd decided to share it at long last — but the precise location and topology was to be kept a closely guarded secret until we got there. All we knew was that it was in the Lakes somewhere, and that it would be fab. Well, OK then. So, armed with this exhaustive intel, James and I, along with our mates Tom and Rik, hastily convened on what we hoped would be a dry-ish day.

Dry-ish. Well, during the long trip up from Yorkshire to the Lakes, sitting in the passenger seat of an ancient Nissan van, listening to Tom regale me with stories and facts about pylons (not nearly as boring as it sounds), the rain on the windscreen was rather foreboding. At first, it sprinkled. Then it beat, then blotted, and then deluged almost to the point of the wipers not working. I took out my phone and looked at it; the MET office forecast was all "cloudy with some sunshine". Hmm. This was going to be interesting.

WETTER THAN AN OTTER'S POCKET

Upon arrival, then, vans were parked, bikes were assembled — including some spectacular last-minute fettling involving a missing shock



"Nothing like a splash of sunshine!"



Shoulders to the wheel once more

bolt, a Coke can, three pipe cleaners and a wad of used chewing gum, and... it wasn't raining! This fact, however, offered scant comfort, as the previous deluge — and apparently plenty more in the days prior — had served to cover the road in a glistening sheen of water that was only too keen to transfer itself to our arses with gleeful abandon, via our back tyre. The (five minute prior) decision to not bother with waterproof shorts was proving a little, um, premature. And this was just the bloody road to the trail.

The first bit of trail proper — or, at least, the first off-road — was a stiff climb. I don't think I'm alone when I say that long, open climbs aren't the most fun bits, but there are plenty of good reasons why a climb is best done at the beginning; hopefully you'll wind up with an excellent descent at the end of the day, it's a good way to warm up and get the worst stuff out of the way first, all that jazz. However, this one in particular was lent an extra special aura by the chafing of now-dripping shorts



Rocky descents are a just reward for the indignities of Trench Arse



Spray time: sometimes going with the flow isn't a metaphor, it's a method



against thigh, and a somewhat uncomfortable feeling from a now thoroughly moistened chamois. As we swung towards a slightly less than exceptionally pretty phone mast, there was a break in the clouds, and the sun came out. This was just the excuse James needed to perch himself somewhere discreet in order that the rest of us could ride backwards and forwards through a wide selection of ever-deepening puddles. I didn't realise that Trench Arse could be a thing, but I was beginning to suspect it might be before the day was out.

And then came the first descent. Although it had stopped raining, there was absolutely no chance of us remaining dry; the trail was a beautiful ribbon of gleaming silver, as the light reflected off the water that covered it. It was difficult to admire the view, glorious as it was, as we tussled with bikes, water, wildly variable grip and the fickle vicissitudes of James' lens on the way down. Once we'd managed to persuade James that we might actually need to get going before we came down with something fatal, the descent was a (very gloopy) delight. Aquaplaning, we were

totally unaware of which bits of trail actually had traction and which bits didn't until we'd ridden over them and found out the hard way. By the time we reached the bottom, my spirits had begun to rise substantially. That. Was. Fun. And — er — wet. But mostly fun. And wet.

Curiously, after a short spin up the valley on mercifully well-drained double track, the trail split into two. On one side, it continued up the side of the valley, and headed over to the trail we needed; on the other, it crossed a bridge over the river before winding up the opposite side of the valley. James was adamant we should go this way. The reason soon became apparent — crossing the river again was a ford, with some pretty stepping stones which enabled moisture-averse riders to skip daintily across the river while ensuring that their tootsies remained dry. Or, at least that's what I imagine may have happened if weather hadn't happened with a capital "W". As it was, water cascaded over the stones with vim and gusto; it soaked our whimpering, pathetic feet with brio and pep.

We tried to ride it, we really did. First of all, James waded through and got his camera out with a gleeful cackle to record our misadventures. One by one, we set out to ride through, only to find out that two to three feet of very fast sideways-moving water presents something of a challenge. And frankly, not one that can easily be defeated when there's a highly amused man with a camera trying to capture you looking ridiculous. On the plus side, it was weirdly warm, and hence not completely unpleasant, until we'd struggled and spluttered to the other side, that is, and the chills set in. I made a mental note that, next time I was faced with a ride as moist as this, I was going to bring a small portable stove and some sausages. Either to eat, or to stuff in my socks to warm my feet up.

THE LONG AND GRINDING ROAD

After the ford, we'd seen a few 4x4s labouring up the other side of the hill. Slower than walking pace; frequent stopping; lots of yelling and gesticulation. As it happens, that sentence described us as well as it did them, as the



**Sun-gilded fells are
a golden opportunity
to catch up with friends**

slipperiness, or the gradient, or the terrain, or pure unadulterated laziness meant that pushing was by far the most civilised option after a short while. Especially if we wanted to look our best for James's camera. And I needed all the help I could get.

I don't know what it is about bikers that we are capable of so many different shades of delayed gratification. For every sweet thread of glorious nadgery singletrack, there's another horrendous climb that has to be ground, gurned, or — more likely with my increasing years and waistline — pushed up. But that weary trudge keeps us coming back and back again, for a brief taste of the sweetest gossamer trail on the other side. Or, in this case, the huge, wide doubletrack of maximum steppyness. Oh, this promised to be fun.

SLATE EXPECTATIONS

By now, the weather had well and truly cleared up, and we were treated to a truly glorious descent — wide, for sure, but massively slate-y with plenty of slithery line choice options (and mistakes) for the unwary. It was usually best to let the bike go where it wanted, to try and keep the front wheel in front of the back one, and to issue direction changes by nothing so much as some sort of puckered-arse telepathy. Eventually, we finally caught up with the 4x4ers, who'd all regrouped at the bottom of the descent for a fag and a dog-walking break. Offers of beer and smokes politely declined, all that remained was a brief waterlogged climb, followed by another waterlogged descent back to the waiting car.

It seems that, even in the throes of either a New Technological Dawn, or the End Times, whichever this turns out to be (my money's on the latter), and even with new trails at our fingertips, the collective cultural mindset still



**"Now what was it that
Andy Barlow said about
neutral positioning?"**

seems to gravitate towards places it *knows*, even if there are options of trails elsewhere that might be far, far less trodden. It makes sense — after all, if you've never ridden the Lakes before, the first place you'll head to will be one of the honeypots. Keswick, say. It's all to the good, then, that there's still a place for friends, and their magical powers of persuasion. Computers or phones can't cajole. They can't convince, or wheedle. They can't promise anything beyond what you allow yourself to be open to; people have access to much more mysterious ways of getting you to do what they want, and can convince you that they know better trails. Ones that aren't nearly as well ridden, but which can offer the same thrill of technical challenge, as well as a sense that you're riding something not often ridden. People, in short, are much better than computers at convincing you that they know best.

And sometimes, they're right. **mbr**



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does it take to fix
a tyre? Three**



**A proffered packet
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Wheelies, back hops and cutties are fun but will also improve your trailcraft, so stop being self-conscious and upgrade your skills by relearning how to play

Words: Andy Barlow

Photos: Andy McCandlish

THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT!

Dirt School's coaching app lets you see the right and wrong techniques in slow-mo

DIRTSCHOOL

CAR PARK SKILLS: PART 1

t's that time of the year again where the trails are slippery, the weather is offensive, and your bike time is limited. Instead of concentrating on winter skills, or even regular mountain bike technique, we thought it an ideal time to take a fresh approach and encourage you to play.

Take a look at any good rider and you'll see how they are able to flick their bike around with ease and somehow have this innate ability to place it exactly where they want to.

Why is that? Are we to assume they are just naturally gifted? Or is there something else going on? Over the next few issues we're going to encourage you to find a quiet corner and just muck about on your bike. Wheelies, skids, endos and track stands mostly seem like tricks for kids, but they will give you such a hard-wired understanding of how to balance your bike that practising them will undoubtedly make you a better rider on the trails as well. So why do so few of us take time to master these skills?

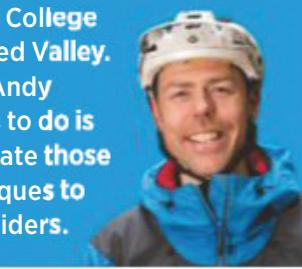
SELF-CONSCIOUS BY NATURE

Firstly we are all way too self-conscious. There seems to be a culture among a lot of mountain bikers that you're not allowed to look stupid. We're all terrified of coming off our bikes in front of anyone for fear of them taking the piss.

Or even worse: exposing us for someone that's just making it up as we go. We don't want to look like the weakest one in a group, so we all just pretend that we've got it worked out and make sure that we always stick well within our comfort

zone and ride things that we know how to do well. That way we can always look like we know what we're doing. The trouble is, if you only ever do things to keep up appearances, you will remain stuck at your current skill level.

No one can do any of this stuff first time. Allow yourself the time and don't worry what people think about you stumbling.



FEAR OF FAILURE

We're all scared of stumbling or falling off our bikes. It's almost like we think crashing our bikes is a stupid thing to do, and that you should just be able to do stuff immediately. Failure is a normal part of learning, and no one can do a new skill immediately. You need to try it a few times to even get your head around it. Then there will be a few more shots where you're learning the feeling. Only after a bit of feedback, determination and encouragement will you start to get near. The first thing we try and do at any Dirt School session is create a safe learning environment. This means we celebrate any person taking part in a new skill or activity. Regardless of whether or not they succeed at it. The last thing you want to do to a person is make them feel self-conscious about failing, or scared to try something new.

HOW DO YOU DO THIS?

If you're really worried about what other riders will think about you, then perhaps you need to find a quiet corner of a car park somewhere and just muck about on your own for a bit. With no one to see what you're doing, it might be easier to try something new. You can just play and get your head around how much you can pull your brakes before they lock, and what happens when you pull your front brake with your weight back versus rolling your weight forwards while increasing the pull on the lever. You can try coming to a complete stop on your brakes,

then throwing your weight back and accelerating while staying seated. How quickly does your front wheel rise? Whereabouts on the lift do you have to pull the rear brake to stop looping out? Can you just step off the back when it does? All of these are going to be complete disasters the first time you try them. But if no one is around to see then what's the harm in trying? Maybe you can try it in front of your mates later once you've tried it 25-30 times on your own first. At least then you'll feel like you've got a slightly better feeling for it.

THE COACH

ANDY BARLOW

Before joining Dirt School Andy liked to win things – races like the Scottish XC Champs and the Scottish Downhill Champs. Since 2009, though, he's coached some of the world's best riders with Dirt School and helped bring on the BASE MTB course at Borders College in the Tweed Valley. But what Andy really likes to do is communicate those pro techniques to everyday riders.

THE WHEELIE

This is the most accessible of all the tricks for kids. It's fairly straightforward and will be a useful skill on technical or steep climbs once you master it. It's also one that you can try almost anywhere and will turn a boring ascent on a fire road into a new challenge.

Tip 1: Stay seated throughout. Although you can lower your upper body as you slow down on the way in by bending your elbows, make sure you stay seated as you accelerate and rock your upper body back upright. This throwing your weight back will aid you, but as soon as you stand up you'll be going forwards again so sit down throughout.

Tip 2: Pedal don't pull. Aim your bike uphill, use your brakes to slow down to a walking pace. Use powerful pedal strokes to accelerate the front of the bike up. Don't pull on the bars as you'll just pull your weight forward. Instead select a gear that you can accelerate into and use that to get the front wheel up.

Tip 3: Cover the rear brake. As soon as you feel off balance, or like you've gone too far and could loop out, pull the rear brake. This will cancel the wheelie immediately, and after a bit of practice you can use a light squeeze of the lever to adjust your balancing point.

Tip 4: Step off the back. This is a lot easier on flat pedals because you can just step off the back of your bike. Make sure you're getting a feel for pedalling into the balancing point, then just go past it and step off the back. This won't work above a certain speed though, so slow speeds only.



THE ONE-HANDED WHEELIE

This one is slightly trickier, but a good progression for those of you that have already mastered the wheelie. With a little practice it's actually no more difficult either, because you have an arm that you can use to balance your tipping point with. Just remember to keep your rear brake covered with the hand that remains on the bars.

Tip 1: Skip to wheelies round a pole further on in this article.

Tip 2: Engage your core and lock out the arm that remains on the bars with a slight bend in the elbow.

Tip 3: Try and land with both hands back on the bars again.



THE NO-HANDED WHEELIE

This one is a lot more difficult and is a lot easier on slightly steeper climbs. Make sure that you are very comfortable with regular wheelies and one-handed wheelies before you try this.

Tip 1: Find a comfortable balancing point with a regular wheelie.

Tip 2: Lean slightly forward as you take your hands off.

Tip 3: Cross your legs over the front of the nose of the saddle as you pedal to stop sliding backwards.

Tip 4: Keep the speed low.

Wheelies are one of the easiest tricks to get your head around because you can do them anywhere



BACK HOPS

This one is a bit of a trials skill that is just fun to learn. It will give you a great understanding of where your timing point is and allow you to make quick adjustments when you run out of other options. It's also the same technique that you use to nudge your back wheel up difficult step-up climbs, and is a good way of getting out of trouble if you come to a complete stop but don't want to plant a foot.

Step 1: Learn how to come to a complete stop with both your brakes locked and use a level bunny hop, or speed hop, to balance. This involves basically hopping both your wheels from side to side depending on which way you're leaning, so that you stay upright.

Step 2: Do the exact same thing but with your front wheel slightly higher. Ideally you can lean this on something wedge shaped so that you can work your way along and the front wheel can get higher as you go along. To start though, a step, a kerb, or even a bench will do. Once your front wheel is on, find a place on your bike where

you're centred and just hop like you were on level ground as before.

Step 3: With your front wheel getting higher on the step or bench, play with rocking your weight back so you can do one or two hops on your rear wheel. Just touch your front wheel back on the bench if it feels unstable. With a little practice you will be able to go away from the obstacle on your back wheel. Or rock onto the back wheel without needing a step or bench.



Once you can wheelie it comes in handy for a lot more than you first realise



CLIMBING STEP-UPS

Using the wheelie to raise your front wheel over step-ups on climbs is a great way of continuing to accelerate at the obstacle and keeping your momentum going. Just remember to stand up out of the saddle once your front wheel is over the step to allow your rear wheel to roll up with very little weight on it. Having a good understanding, or feeling, for where your balancing point is, will mean you can raise your front wheel on steeper climbs without fear of looping out. This is great for your regular balance as you can place your front wheel exactly where you want it to be and pick your way through rougher sections with balance and control.

DROP-OFF

This is basically a manual. Remember that when you see riders with their weight back they are actually throwing it back there to counterbalance the front end of their bike. What they're also doing is pushing with their legs so that the front end is driven up from underneath with a powerful leg push. They're not lifting the front end up or pulling on the bars. Learning the wheelie or back hop will give you more confidence to trust that tipping point and will let you move about on your bike with confidence.

- **Tip 1:** Learn to manual on the flat. This is probably the hardest one to master as your rear wheel doesn't fall off anything. You have to be doing it right to make it work.
- **Tip 2:** Practice with the rear brake covered, but once you get it try and spend time at the tipping point by controlling the leg push — NOT by using the brake to keep it there.
- **Tip 3:** Start small and work your way up.



ROUND A POLE WHEELIE

This is a great one to learn safely as you're always holding on to something solid. It's also a good way of learning the one-handed wheelie because it will teach you the control over your rear brake and where exactly the tipping point is.

- **Tip 1:** Select a low gear so you can easily accelerate into the wheelie and raise the front wheel with minimal effort.
- **Tip 2:** Cover the rear brake with the hand that remains on the bars and lean away from the pole. As you pedal you should be able to rotate around the pole by relaxing your grip and allowing your fingers to slide round the cylinder.
- **Tip 3:** Keep going! Once you find all the balance and tipping points, this is one of the easiest tricks in this article. You won't get it first time though, so keep at it. If it all goes wrong the worst that will happen will be you slowly slide down the pole and end up in a heap at the bottom. It's low risk and fun.



THE CUTTIE

This is a car park classic. Look about in any busy trail centre car park and you'll see deep ruts at the edge of parking spaces or carved into the grass. These are formed by kids coming in low and cornering by pushing with their legs. This will cause the back end of the bike to slide. You can control the slide by backing off the pressure.

- **Tip 1:** Come in low with your pedals level.
- **Tip 2:** Corner tight and stand up powerfully.
- **Tip 3:** If it slides, back off the pressure.
- **Tip 4:** Keep your body low.

Andy is coming in low and pushing his legs straight to give him more grip

HOMEWORK

Go find a quiet corner of a trail and have fun. You won't be able to do any of this stuff first go. No one can. But with the right mindset you can make quick progress and have a much better feeling for what you can get away with on your bike. Ultimately you want to just raise a smile and play. As adults we are told that we have to act responsibly and grow up. This is one of those times where you throw that advice out of the window and just have fun. Play as much as you can on your bike and you'll enjoy it so much more. That's the whole point after all. Don't ride like other people think you should. Do it for yourself.

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INTRODUCING

BENJI'S NUKEPROOF REACTOR 290C ELITE

£3,799.99 / 29in / nukeproof.com



THE RIDER

BENJI HAWORTH

Position Deputy digital editor

Mostly rides The North

Height 6ft 1in

Weight 73kg

THE BIKE

■ 29in trail bike with 130mm travel, also available in 27.5in with identical build kits and pricing

■ Four-bar linkage is designed around wide-range cassettes

■ Carbon and alloy frame options, all with flip-chip geometry adjustment

■ Elite model gets a 140mm-travel Fox 36 fork, and Fox Float DPX2 rear shock

■ Ten-model range with four 29in and six 27.5in models

MONTH 1: Fresh from his tenure with the Vitus Sentier 27 VRS, Benji takes on a new trail bike from a brand better known for big-hitters

The Reactor is Nukeproof's first trail bike for quite some time. The nearest it's got to bikes like this previously was the cult favourite Mega TR back in 2015. But even then, the Mega TR was something of a radical ripper pushed into trail duties, as opposed to a proper all-in trail bike. There's no shoehorning with the new Reactor though, it's designed to be capable and concerned with climbing, not just about shredding the descents.

Reading the Reactor's geometry chart is actually rather underwhelming: 65.5° head angle, 75° seat angle, 480mm reach on a large...so far, so meh. Where's all the 'progressive geometry' hype man? Doesn't Nukeproof know we're living in the era of near-80° seat angles, sub-64° head angles and 500mm-plus reach? What was it thinking? Has Nukeproof bottled it? Has it missed the boat with the new Reactor?

Well, that's pretty much what I, and no doubt plenty of others, thought upon first reading

about the Reactor. And then I rode one. And it was flipping fast. Everywhere. Particularly over rocks and roots. The front and rear (especially the rear) suspension is incredible on this bike. And it means I get to type things like 'rides like it has way more travel than it has' and 'bottomless feel'. That bearing in the rear shock mount is actually witchcraft. It makes all other bikes feel like they're broken when I ride them.

At the end of the first few rides I found myself thinking 'amazing suspension, shame about the geometry... if only they'd put a steeper seat angle on it and made it with a longer reach'. After the next few rides I realised I'd been hasty. With the saddle shuffled forward on its rails (does anyone pay attention to the Min-Max marking on saddle rails any more?) and factoring in the healthy 440mm chainstays, making uphill progress is actually fine. It's great in fact.

While it is often tempting to want for longer reach, there is a real-world tipping point where play turns into ploughing. Ploughing is faster



Stone protection on down tube lives up to the name

in a straight line, but bike riding is not about being half a second faster. It's about enjoying yourself. Nukeproof makes the Mega 290 if you want an enduro plough. Trail bikes are about weekend fun not time-chasing. The Reactor walks the fine line between playful and skittish impressively well.

Having said that, I would like to slap an angle adjust headset in this bike — that or a 150mm fork just like the top-end Reactor 290c RS gets. You know, for science. Will knocking a degree or two off the head angle improve the bike's technical ability with no ill-effects? Hopefully I can find out.

WHY IT'S HERE
It's Nukeproof's first dedicated short-travel trail bike



SPECIFICATION

Frame T-700/800
Monocoque carbon,
130mm travel

Shock Fox
Float DPX2
Performance EVOL

Fork Fox 36 Float
Performance,
140mm travel

Wheels DT Swiss
M1900 Spline
wheelset, Maxxis
Assegai/DHR II WT
3C MaxxTerra EXO+
29x2.5/2.4in tyres

Drivetrain Shimano
SLX M7100, 30t
chainset, r-mech
and shifter

Brakes Shimano SLX
M7120 four-piston,
203/180mm

Components
Nukeproof Horizon
800mm bar,
Nukeproof Neutron
45mm stem, Brand-X
Ascend 150mm
dropper, Nukeproof
Horizon SL saddle

Sizes M, L, XL

Weight 33lbs (14.95kg)

Contact nukeproof.
com

GEOMETRY

LOW SETTING

Size tested L

Head angle 66.1°

Seat angle 71°

BB height 330mm

Chainstay 440mm

Front centre 794mm

Wheelbase 1,235mm

Down tube 745mm

Top tube 640mm

Reach 480mm

IN THE SHED



Canyon Strive CF 8.0 £4,099



Marin Mount Vision 8 £4,750



Norco Sight C NX12 VLT £5,900



NS Synonym TR2 £4,199.99



Nukeproof Reactor 290C Elite £3,799.99



BEN'S NS SYNONYM TR 2

£4,199.99 / 29in / hotlines-uk.com



THE RIDER

BEN DAY

Position
Account director
Mostly rides Trails around Dorset
Height 6ft
Weight 80kg

THE BIKE

- Aggressive 'down-country' trail bike with a full carbon frame and 120mm travel
- Rolls on 29in wheels to keep speed and efficiency high
- First XC bike to come from NS with a focus on big days in the saddle
- Available in four frame sizes and two price points

MONTH 2: It's impressive on XC trails, and upgrades have made it even better. But nothing is ever perfect in this life...

Bike parks are not the usual domain for XC-style whippets, but the NS Synonym seems to lap it up anyway. As I stated last month, its modern geometry inspires confidence but can get you into trouble if the tracks are rough and loose. Seeing as most bike parks have a good selection of groomed trails, I've enjoyed the speed and ease at which this bike rips through the flow trails and red-line jumps at Windhill. In fact, I've never ridden an XC bike that has made me feel so confident. What's more, it's a breeze to pedal back up, which is a massive bonus as I much prefer to ride than push.

To boost the bike's potential I have made a number of small changes to the spec; fitting a wider, higher-rise bar and a shorter stem. I'm hoping the vibration-damping Spank Oozy Trail 780 Vibrocore bar will make up for the lack of fork travel, and I instantly noticed how much easier the bike is to manual with the shorter, 48mm Split stem.

Interestingly the modified riding position hasn't degraded the bike's climbing ability, even if the higher front end has certainly helped in the steeper chutes that I've ridden.

One niggle is with the Fox lockout lever. It's a bit plasticky and its function is counterintuitive — depressing the lever and tensioning the cable opens the damping on both the fork and shock. Releasing the lever locks out the suspension and requires very little thumb force (there's a faint

WHY IT'S HERE
The promise of XC pace with enduro attitude



click). This is fine once you are used to it, which I'm not, so I've mounted it further inboard on the bar as it's easy to knock accidentally when I'm searching for the dropper remote. So

much so, that on a couple of occasions I have got to the bottom of a rocky downhill and discovered that I had mistakenly released the lever and have been descending on an almost rigid bike.

Now, as much as I loved riding fully rigid in 1989, I wasn't quite expecting time travel and the subsequent arm pump that I have encountered at the push of a button. Initially I put it down to rider error, but having moved the remote inboard, it's happened a couple of times, so it's definitely releasing by itself in larger rock gardens and on stutter bumps.

I have played around with the cable tension and it seems better now, but I will be speaking to Fox about solving the problem once and for all. I'll update you with my progress next month.

SPECIFICATION

Frame Superlite carbon, 120mm travel

Shock Fox Performance Elite Float DPS 2-pos remote

Fork Fox 34 Float Performance Grip, 120mm travel

Wheels Rotary hubs, WTB ST light 29in rims, Maxxis Rekon/Ikon 29x2.4/2.35in tyres

Drivetrain Truvativ Stylo 7K chainset 34t, SRAM GX Eagle shifter and r-mech

Brakes SRAM Level T, 180/160mm

Components NS Licence Mini Rise Lite 760mm bar, Synonym Trail 60mm stem, X-Fusion Manic 150mm post, Octane One Crit saddle

Sizes S, M, L, XL

Weight 12.7kg (28lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested L

Head angle 66°

Seat angle 70°

BB height 345mm

Chainstay 435mm

Front centre 796mm

Wheelbase 1,229mm

Down tube 755mm

Top tube 610mm

Reach 491mm

THE

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PB'S NORCO SIGHT C NX12 VLT

£5,900 / 27.5in / evanscycles.com



THE RIDER

PAUL BURWELL

Position Freelance writer/tester

Mostly rides Surrey Massif

Height 5ft 10in

Weight 79kg
(on a good day)

THE BIKE

■ Shimano STEPS equipped e-bike with 150mm of travel

■ 27.5in wheels shod with 2.6in Maxxis Minion 3C tyres

■ Has a whopping 630Wh lithium-ion battery hidden in the down tube

■ E-bike-specific SRAM NX groupset and ultra-short 165mm Shimano E8000 crank arms

MONTH 7: Range anxiety has been the preserve of e-car drivers, but now it's creeping up on well-used e-bikes

I've been whizzing around on the Norco Sight C NX12 VLT for over six months now and I've just started to experience some battery anxiety. It was innocuous at first — I was riding along with the display showing two tokens of fun, then suddenly in the space of a few minutes the red light of death started flashing.

Obviously, lithium-ion batteries do degrade, and the rule of thumb is that after 1,000 charging cycles there is a 20-25 per cent reduction in storage capacity. However, if you go onto the Shimano e-bike site it says it will guarantee a minimum of 60 per cent health after the same number of charge cycles. I don't know how Shimano has arrived at this figure, and if there is a sliding scale, like 90 per cent after 200 charges. I have asked, but so far I've not had anything back from the guys in Japan.

While I'm waiting, I thought a good idea would be to sync the Norco Sight C NX12 VLT to the Shimano e-Tube i-Phone app to check if it included any information about battery capacity. Unfortunately, this app isn't the most reliable and it took me a good hour to get it to connect. I deleted some of the redundant settings, but I couldn't find any info about battery health.

I need to visit a Shimano Service Centre and plug the bike into a sort of 'mother' app to access that information. Shimano is trying to arrange a visit so hopefully I'll update this next month.

So I don't know how healthy the battery is, but I have started to charge more often between rides. Since the Norco Sight C NX12 VLT has an integrated battery, it means having a heavy, unwieldy bike

WHY IT'S HERE
Powered version
of Norco's
award-winning
trail bike



sat in the hallway of my house on an almost daily basis. I appreciate the clean looks, but I'd much rather unclip the battery and just bring that indoors for charging. Being able to swap the battery out would also mean I could have a spare to extend the run time, or for those times when I forget to charge it, or want to go on a really long ride.

To end this month's update, I was going to rabbit on about how I've been enjoying the Norco Sight C NX12 VLT even with the reduced battery life, but the bike just died and I had to pedal about 10 miles back to my van with no assistance. It seems that the screen has also suffered from water ingress, and it's now fuzzy and grey.

I've checked the troubleshooting tips but found nothing, so I'm going to have to improvise, which means unplugging everything and getting the hair dryer out. If I can bring it back from the dead you'll see an update next month. If not, this may be its last will and testament.

SPECIFICATION

Frame Carbon, 150mm travel

Shock RockShox Deluxe RT

Fork RockShox Pike RC, 160mm travel

Motor Shimano E8000 STEPS

Battery In-tube Lithium Ion 630Wh

Wheels Novatec/DT Swiss H370 hubs, WTB ST i29 rims, Maxxis Minion DHF/DHR II 27.5x2.6in tyres

Drivetrain Shimano E8000 chainset 32t, SRAM NX r-mech and shifter

Brakes SRAM Guide T, 200mm

Components Norco 800mm bar, Forged 50mm stem, TranzX YSP12JL Stealth 150mm dropper post, WTB Volt Sport saddle

Sizes S, M, L

Weight 22.75kg (50.16lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested L

Head angle 66.2°

Seat angle 69.5°

BB height 333mm

Chainstay 445mm

Front centre 795mm

Wheelbase 1,240mm

Down tube 740mm

Top tube 600mm

Reach 470mm



JAMIE'S MARIN MOUNT VISION 8

£4,750 / 27.5in / marinbikes.com



THE RIDER

JAMIE DARLOW

Position Mag writer, vid maker, risk taker

Mostly rides

Surrey Hills and South Downs

Height 6ft 1in

Weight 78kg

THE BIKE

■ 27.5in trail bike with 2.6in tyres and blinging full-carbon frame

■ 150mm-travel R3ACT 2Play suspension from Nalid offers a unique perspective and look

■ RockShox Deluxe R shock and Pike RC Solo Air fork balance travel front and rear

■ Entry-level bike in a three-strong range, with the 9 and Pro models above it

MONTH 6: New shock or new bike?

The top-of-the-range Mount Vision 9 costs £1,200 more than my longterminer. That's no small change, but after trying the posh X2 shock from the pricier bike, I'm convinced it's worth the upgrade. For starters, that Fox X2 shock lends the bike some much-needed calmness on technical trails.

I'd got used to the rowdy feel of my bike, reacting to every obstacle in the trail as the suspension holds the bike in a stable position without diving or extending, but it's way more forgiving now. The superior damping from the X2 eats up roots and rocks without transferring the impact to my feet, and I'm in much less danger of them being blown off the pedals. I've settled on a light touch with the four-way damping on the new shock, adding just a click or two of compression, which is all the bike seems to need.

You could, of course, buy the Mount Vision 8 and upgrade the shock for around £500 from Silverfish UK. Yes, you'd miss out on the better SRAM drivetrain the top-end bike boasts, but you'd save £700.

Unfortunately, upping the performance of the back end has shone a light on the front end, which could also benefit from the Fox 36 the pricier bike has as stock. It's not that the RockShox Pike fork fitted to my longterminer is bad – far from it – but suddenly it doesn't feel as composed as the back end.

So if I was starting over and picking a Mount Vision as a longterminer, I would now go for the 9, as the bike's performance outweighs the additional cost.

WHY IT'S HERE

Has Marin made a trail bike with game-changing suspension?



BEN'S CANYON STRIVE CF 8.0

£4,099 / 29in / canyon.com



THE RIDER

BEN SMITH

Position Art editor

Mostly rides
Surrey Hills

Height 5ft 9in

Weight 77kg

THE BIKE

■ 29er enduro race bike with up to 150mm rear travel

■ Shapeshifter switches between XC and DH modes on the fly

■ High-end Fox Performance Elite suspension front and rear

■ Carbon Reynolds wheels and SRAM X01 groupset complete dream-build specification

MONTH 4: Even the stock tyres are hard to beat

Upgrades are common on the mbr longterminer fleet – swapping out tyres, changing bars and stems or, if you're Jamie, systematically upgrading every single component on the bike to get it just-so.

No such shenanigans are needed with the Canyon, though. Its bulletproof build means no compromises, and I can concentrate on upgrading my skills instead. Fantastic if you're buying this bike, but it makes it tough for me to pick holes in it.

It's taken me four months but I think I've finally found a chink in its carbon armour. The Strive comes stock with Maxxis Minion DHR II 2.4in tyres, a choice that can't be faulted as they're superb in pretty much every condition. Interestingly, though, Canyon fits a super-sticky 3C Maxx Grip compound on the front, and on the fast, hardpacked trails of BikePark Wales I couldn't help but think how much this extra drag was slowing me down on flatter trails.

I initially considered swapping it for a faster-rolling Maxx Terra compound to match the rear, but ultimately I prefer my trails steep and natural, where a little extra front-end grip is definitely a bonus. So the Maxx Grip DHR II stays put, and my chink turned out to be a dust speck that vanished as quickly as it appeared.

Given that the Strive CF 8.0 seems to have no weaknesses, I find it strange that Canyon has just dropped the price from £4,099 to £3,639. Still, if you do want to run different tyres for different conditions, you can now afford to have them mounted on a second set of wheels and still be quids in. Bonus!

WHY IT'S HERE
Does the Shapeshifter really offer two bikes in one?

Tested

BIKE YOKE DIVINE DROPPER POST

£279

SPECIFICATION Weight: 451g • Drop: 125, 160 and 185mm • Sizes: 30.9 and 31.6 • Contact: tftuned.com

The Divine dropper is the third addition to the Bike Yoke dropper range, sitting alongside the Revive, which I tested back in the summer, and the Divine SL, the company's lightweight XC option. The Divine and Divine SL share similar architecture but the former is £50 cheaper and has a longer, adjustable drop (the Divine SL is a 80mm post). This is done by clipping small plastic spacers to a shaft inside the body of the dropper and allows users to reduce drop by 20mm in 5mm jumps.

Importer TFTuned claims adding the spacers is a five-minute job, but it does require some specialist tools and we found it more like a 20-minute task. Obviously, the lower portion of the post still remains the same length, so if you're struggling running a longer dropper in the frame due to a kink in the seat tube or suspension pivot placement, it's not a substitute but it does offer greater flexibility.

The Divine shares the same Auto Revive feature as the Divine SL and Revive, which resets the post with each full compression/extension cycle. This eliminates some of the sagging at the top of the travel you get with some hydraulic posts. The Divine internals

are also lighter and, like all Bike Yoke posts, it can be serviced by any home mechanic with some simple tools.

The other big plus with the Bike Yoke design is the collar that sits just above the seat clamp is super-shallow, so you generally get an extra 20mm to play with — in other words you can squeeze a 150mm dropper in the space of a 125mm.

To improve durability, Bike Yoke's Triggy X remote lever turns on a sealed cartridge bearing, but I find that when fitting the cable, it's easy to kink. The remote is adjustable laterally, but there's no angle adjustment and, with the lever having quite a lot of throw, it can be a bit of a stretch if you have small hands. The fixing clamp isn't hinged either, so you have to remove the grip to fit it, although cleaner Matchmaker-style options are available.

Like the Revive we tested six months back, the Divine takes its time to return to full extension, and if you half-press the lever it creeps up at a snail's pace. Once it reaches full extension it does produce a metallic clunk, so you do know your seat is at full height before you sit down; I'd just like it to be a tad quicker. Back-to-back with the Revive, the Divine is not as smooth, but you'd be hard-pushed to notice this difference,



Triggy X remote lever uses sealed bearings

especially if you're coming off a mid-range cable-operated dropper.

With their top-quality construction and internals, Bike Yoke droppers are undoubtedly expensive, but the Divine bucks this trend — it undercuts the Fox Transfer, DVO Garnet, KS Lev and the new RockShox Reverb. It's lighter than most of these by around 150g too, plus it's more reliable and has the added benefit of being fully travel-adjustable. That makes it one of the most versatile dropper posts on the market, and a must-buy if you can't decide what drop you need and just want to play around with different options before making a decision.

Paul Burwell



YOUR TESTERS



DANNY MILNER

Road tripping for our Trail of the Year awards, seen Leeds Urban Bike Park and Hamsterley Forest and almost all of the M1 at its wettest best.



ALAN MULDOON

Not tested anything yet this century, he'll get round to it one of these years. Too busy riding the new Trust linkage fork and building a gym.



PAUL BURWELL

Spotted half-clad a car park, sponging himself down in a washing up bowl. All in the name of product testing, you understand.



MICK KIRKMAN

Testing big-coverage enduro helmets this month. Near boiled alive after wrapping cling film over the vents to increase waterproofing.

THULE THRURIDE ROOF RACK

£175

SPECIFICATION Accepts 15mm and 20mm, Boost and non-Boost axles • Contact: freewheel.co.uk

Usually I transport my bike in the boot, but from time to time I'll need to carry two bikes, or I need more interior space. For those occasions I've been using Thule's new ThruRide roof rack, mounted to its aerodynamic Evo Wingbars (from £203). The ThruRide uses a clamp to secure your fork's thru-axle, and because the jaws are easily adjustable, it'll accommodate both 20mm and 15mm options (there's also an adaptor for 9mm quick-release systems). A hidden thumbwheel varies the clamping force, and the large, hinged handle gives you plenty of leverage when closing it. The lever locks in place with a supplied key, securing the bike to the rack and the rack to the car as a deterrent to opportunistic thieves.

The rear wheel holder slides along an extruded alloy rail and uses an integrated ratchet strap to hold it in place. The rack is long enough to accommodate most modern full-suspension bikes — a 29er with a 1,275mm wheelbase fitted fine. Much more though, and the rear wheel would be hanging off the end.

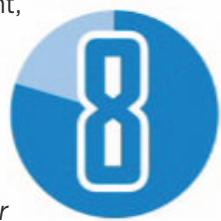
Once the front wheel is removed, putting the bike into the rack takes seconds and can be done without worrying about scratching the roof of your car. You can even wedge the front wheel between the pedals and the handlebar and secure it with a couple of

straps if you want to keep the interior completely mud-free. The axle clamp is effective, and all the bikes I tried remained safe and secure on a mix of motorways and B-roads.

Mounted to Thule's teardrop Evo Wingbars, this roof system is not a cheap option, but it's sleek and secure, and additional wind noise is minimal when not carrying a bike. Despite monitoring it closely, I didn't notice any change in fuel economy either.

If speed and convenience are your number one priorities, the Thule ThruRide's sophisticated refinement and tool-free clamp will be irresistible. If you can live with a more awkward mount, but want to carry your bike in a similar way, there's also Pendle's cheaper Fork Mount rack.

Danny Milner



Thru-axle clamp
locks in place



mbr
ratings
explained
*The scores
on the doors*



1-4 Something's wrong. It's rare, but sometimes a product will have a design flaw or some other weakness that means we can't recommend it. Steer clear.



5-6 OK — one or two faults but it has potential.



7 Good — worth considering.



8 Very good — for the money, we'd buy it.



9 Excellent — a slight mod or two and it might be perfect.



10 Simply the best — we couldn't fault it.



MADISON ZENITH WATERPROOF JACKET

£99.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 338g • Sizes: S-XXL • Contact: freewheel.co.uk

We couldn't squeeze the Zenith into the waterproof jacket test last month, which was disappointing because it's a lot of jacket at a decent price. It's built from a 2.5-layer stretch fabric, which simply means it has a polyester outer layer, a membrane and then a printed inner surface — that's the half layer to save weight and cost.

All the seams are fully taped and there are waterproof zips on the pockets and underarm vents. The front zip is also waterproof and it's backed up by an internal storm flap. This stops water ingress, but I constantly snagged it in the zip at the top — it has a soft fleece backing here and it causes the flap to bunch slightly when you do up the zip.

On the front there are a couple of massive pockets for gear and the pit vents are also big so you can really vent some heat when working hard. The hood features an extended and stiffened peak that's designed to go under the helmet. A couple of draw-strings pull it

tight in against your cheeks, so it doesn't restrict your peripheral vision. The cuffs get small Velcro tags and there's a big elasticated adjuster on the waist.

At 10K/10K the breathability and waterproof figures are evenly split but I found the Zenith more waterproof than breathable. It's great for really cold wet weather, or when riding an e-bike, but on milder winter days I noticed some clamminess next to the skin. With it nice and snug round the collar, it will keep out the worst of the weather and the water run-off has been impressive due to the extra-durable DWR outer finish.

At just under a £100, the Zenith is a great value, lightweight waterproof that you can wear from the outset, or something you pull out from your pack when the weather breaks.

Paul Burwell



SQ-LAB 612 ERGOWAVE ACTIVE SADDLE

£134.95

SPECIFICATION Weight: 260g • Dimensions: 270x143mm • Contact: o-w-d.nl

Bikes and gear may come and go, but some saddle stalwarts, like the superlative SDG Bel Air, have dominated our group tests for over a decade. Their traditional high-arched shape is under threat from the latest wave of saddles though, which look vastly different with the aim of creating anatomical superiority.

The Ergowave is just such an animal, it features a very wide and flat rear section that SQ-Lab says offers more support and optimal pressure distribution for your sit bones. This would make no sense at all if the Ergowave came in just one size, as sit-bones vary from person to person. Fortunately there are four widths to choose from, and it's easy to figure out which size you need thanks to instructions on SQ-Lab's website.

Without question, the Ergowave is the most comfortable saddle I've used. Perhaps it's a coincidence, as I didn't try any other widths, but the fit is excellent and I didn't suffer from pressure points, hotspots or discomfort. This version of the Ergowave also features three different elastomer dampers connecting the saddle to the rails to tune the

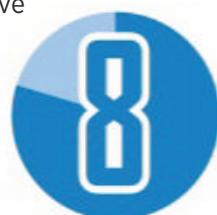
seat's ride feel, but I couldn't determine any difference between them. Elastomer reacts to temperature changes, as anyone who rode with suspension forks in the 90s will remember, so it's possible this isn't the best time of year to test their efficacy.

The Ergowave's rear end has a distinctive lip to it, and this worked wonders for keeping me in the right position when climbing up steep stuff. It's supportive without being cumbersome and reminds me of Canyon's brilliant e-bike saddle. The snub nose looks wrong, but on the bike it proved really unobtrusive. No short snagging, no rubbing, no soreness.

SQ-Lab has created a beguiling saddle in the Ergowave Active; it's supportive

without being harsh, provides a good platform without being obtrusive, and it's very light too. At £135 it's really expensive though — you can get a titanium-railed SDG Bel Air 2.0 for less money than the alloy-railed Ergowave.

Jamie Darlow

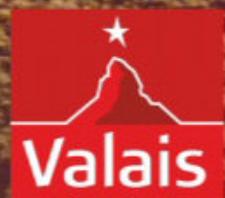


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ENGRAVED ON MY HEART.

GLOWORM XSV LIGHT

£289

SPECIFICATION Weight: 439g (with remote) • Lumens: 3,400, 2,200, 900 • Contact: glowormlites.co.nz

At 3,400 lumens on full power, the eXeSiVe (or XSV for short) is the brightest Gloworm light I've ever tested. It has three Cree LED emitters, arranged laterally in the machined aluminium body and, like all Gloworm lights, these can be swapped out, allowing you to customise the beam pattern. A wide and two spot lenses are fitted as standard but to mix things up, spare spot, wide and flood optics are included in the box.

The unique feature of the XSV is you can sync it with one of Gloworm's dedicated helmet lights and, using the included two-button remote, both lights can then be activated together. The syncing process is straightforward too — you just press the button a couple of times and you're done.

Two light modes are offered — Trail and Commuter. In Trail mode there are four power settings — low, medium and

high — and also an emergency dim setting. In Commuter you just get high, low and flashing. Run time is a claimed 1.5hrs in high beam, but I experienced a bit less than that in the recent cold weather.

Gloworm offers several mounting options. I went with the QR plastic 31.8mm bar clamp, but a 35mm clamp option is available, and two tabs on the bottom of the lamp also let you attach it to a Go Pro armature, be that on the bar or your helmet. An extension cable allows you to route it up top.

The XSV hooks up to a 6,800 mAh Lithium-ion battery, which now has a built-in fuel gauge, although with the battery mounted on the frame, it's not easy to monitor when you're riding. I'd rather have this readout on the back of the main unit, like on Exposure and Genesis lights. I'm also not a fan of the hard-case battery pack because it doesn't fit that well



against a curved frame tube.

With the stock optics, the Gloworm XSV has an excellent spread of light — you can easily see things in the far distance, but there's still plenty of light for close-in work. On full beam I could really ride fast with this light, just not for that long. The light integration is a neat idea — but to make it really useful I'd like to see run time for both lights displayed up front, rather than tucked away where I can't see it.

Paul Burwell



ENDURA MT500 BURNER PANT II

£89.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 466g • Sizes: S-XXL • Colours: Green, black • Contact: endurasport.com

Tapered, lightweight riding pants were everywhere in 2019. I was something of a long kecks latecomer, but I am now fully sold on both the form and the function. It'll have to get pretty warm for me to opt for baggy shorts now.

For me, riding pants can be broken down into three main concerns: fit, fabric and features.

These MT500 Burner Pant II trousers are predominantly made from a four-way stretch fabric. The exceptions are the seat panel (made from a durable, non-stretchy material) and panels behind the knees and at the top of the thigh (made from airy, stretchy mesh fabric). There are also laser-cut breather holes in the inner thigh area. The breather holes feel a bit unnecessary, but I like how the airy mesh panels help keep things comfier where clothing (kneepads, liner shorts) can bunch.

The rear waistband features sticky silicone lines to help keep the trousers from slipping down and there's also the Endura logo on the outside of the rear waistband to stop your jersey from riding up.

The pants have a front zip with a ratchet waist adjuster and Velcro waist adjusters that pull forwards from the top of each bum cheek and anchor on landing strips just below your hips.

I am on the lanky side. I have a 32-33in waist (fluctuating beer belly depending) with 34in inside leg. The length of these pants was fine, but I had to run the Velcro adjusters fully cinched. Which was

fine when riding. Less lanky folk will be well within the fit adjustment range.

I left the ratchet strap alone, as tightening it just made the front bunch up off-centre. I think the pants could ditch this ratchet strap altogether.

At the other end of things, there are elasticated panels on the inside ankle to keep things flap-free with an on-trend taper, while retaining the ability to be pulled on over riding shoes and kneepads.

The funny rubbery chevrons on the outside of the knee are rather curious, and although I initially wrote them off as pointless styling, while riding they do seem to help keep the pant in place around knee pads; helping prevent snags or pull-creep.

All-in-all, the fabric choices and locations have proven to be excellent. If the weather is mild, just wear liner shorts underneath. If it's cold and/or wet, pull on some three-quarter length bib-knickers or full-length tights underneath.

Yes there are a couple of superfluous features (breather holes and ratchet waist adjuster), but the fabrics are really good and the fit is fine for the average rider (and offers good adjustment for slimmer, taller riders too). They ain't cheap, but they have genuinely revolutionised, streamlined and improved my riding wardrobe.

Benji Haworth



MUC-OFF PRESSURE WASHER KIT

£119.99

SPECIFICATION Kit contains three lances, foam washer, bag and one-litre wash, one-litre concentrate • Contact: muc-off.com



Most people tend to fall into one of two schools of thought when it comes to bike cleaning. Either jet washing is the ultimate maintenance sin, blasting away grease and oil and decimating the life expectancy of your pride and joy. Or providing you don't fire the jet directly into your bearings, then it's nothing to worry about — they're supposed to be mountain bikes, after all.

If you're of the former mindset, Muc-Off's new low-pressure washer aims to convince you otherwise. To do this it comes with a special low-pressure lance, that's claimed to be safe on bearings. In fact you get three lances in the heavy-duty roll-top carry bag, all with specific applications. One is a regular high-pressure lance, designed for all those heavy-duty cleaning jobs. Alongside that you get a motorcycle attachment, with a slightly reduced pressure, and then there's the aforementioned bike lance, and a snow foam attachment. Also included for the £20 premium over the jet wash on its own, are two bottles of Muc-Off cleaning fluid.

The jet wash itself gets a familiar hot pink and black colour combo, and feels well made, with all the parts snapping together

with reassuring security. There's also a built-in quiver for the lances and a cleat for the power cable. Certainly it feels better quality than a £50 own-brand job from your local DIY superstore.

So does it work? Well yes, and no. Firstly the snow foam attachment: this screws onto the top of the bike wash bottle and mixes the contents with water to spray a sudsy lather over your bike (or car). As it does with the manual spray bottle, this helps to soften dried dirt so that you don't need to scrub every nook and cranny during washing. The only difference being that it coats absolutely everything, turning your bike into a ghost and your garden into Santa's grotto if you're not careful. After leaving the foam for five minutes you then rinse it off. Don't expect miracles — the best results still come from attacking the dirt before it's had a chance to dry — but it's reasonably effective as a pre-wash.

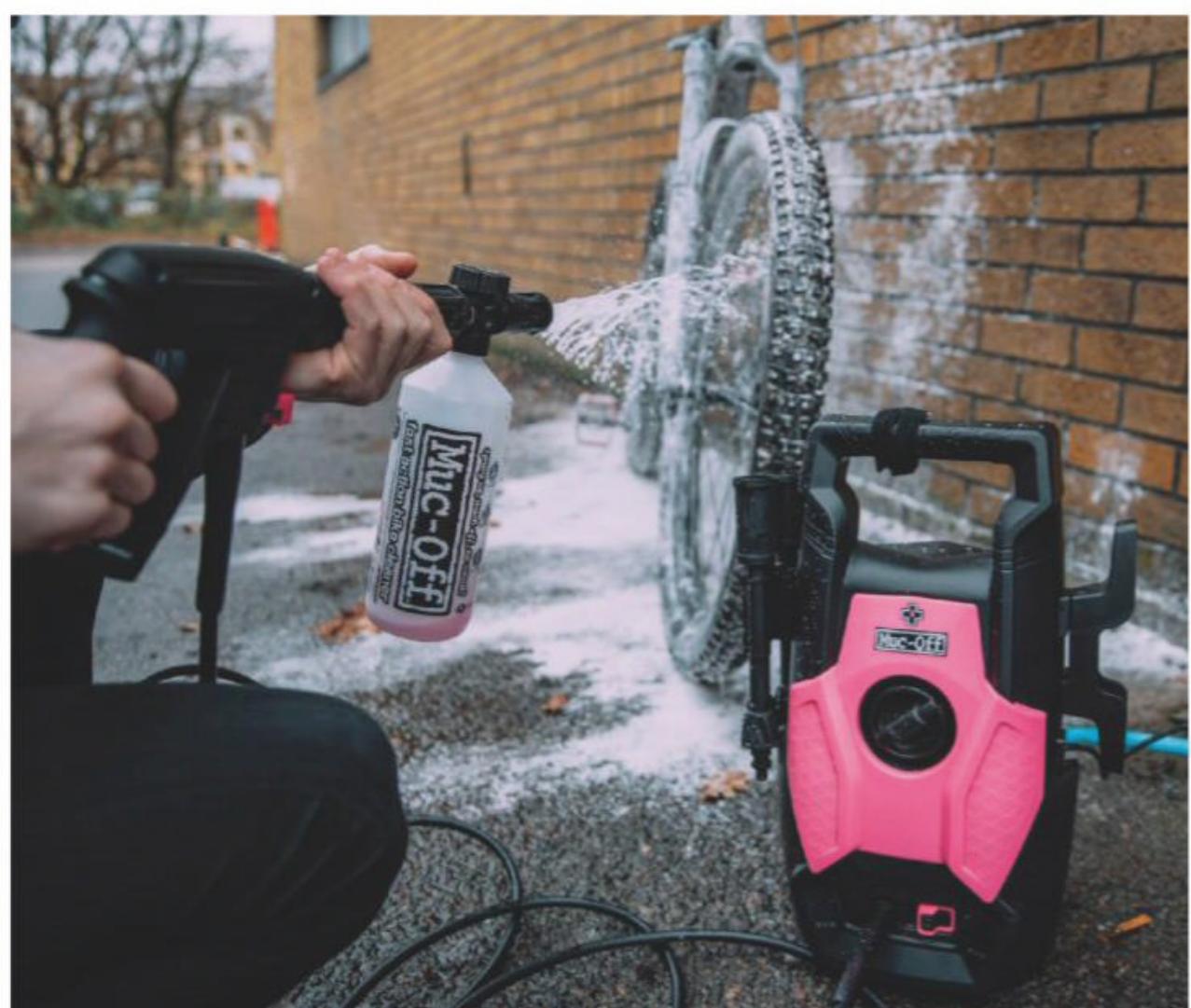
The real selling point of this pressure washer is the bearing-safe bicycle attachment. So to put Muc-Off's claim to the test, we took a Shimano XT wheel with a cup and cone bearing and pumped it full of fresh grease. Then we blasted it for one minute

from 60mm away with the bicycle lance and checked the internals. Inside, the bearings were still thick with grease, but water had got past the seals. It passed our overly demanding test then. Not with flying colours, but successfully enough to suggest that your bearings will be safe if you use it sensibly.

What undermines this result, and herein lays my fundamental issue with this product, is that if you want to wash your bike sympathetically you can just use a hose — you don't actually need to spend over £100 on a jet wash. The hose is also quicker to set up and pack away, and if you want to mess around with snow foam, you can buy ones that work with a hose attachment. And if poor water pressure means you need a boost from the pump, something like the cordless Worx washer would be less of a faff to use for a similar price.

If you need a jet wash and are happy to pay a premium, Muc-Off's Pressure Washer Kit is a good product. But it's also solving a problem that doesn't really exist.

Danny Milner





Enduro helmets

Want extra protection without getting got-headed? You need one of the latest enduro lids

Words & photos: Mick Kirkman

Mountain bike helmet design has been on a technology crash course in the last few years. New lids are more advanced than ever in terms of safety features, and plenty are now modular too; something that enables adaption for trail riding, bike park shredding and big mountain terrain.

Lightweight full-face (and even convertible) helmets have been around for ages, but the do-it-all remit of enduro racing has made them way more versatile and commonplace.

One added benefit being that safety-conscious riders will get fewer weird looks when rocking a full-face for trail riding.

Blending disciplines, enduro kit combines features optimised for cross-country efforts with those for downhill speed. Like many other bike components touched by the enduro bug, the products here merge the extra protection of full-face DH helmets with well-ventilated, open-face trail lids. And, whereas downhill helmets used to be too hot and heavy for pedalling around in all day, the new helmet

breed can do double duties without turning into a sweat bucket.

All eight helmets here represent the latest kit from leading brands. There's plenty of cutting-edge, impact-reducing technology to be found, along with designs that range from super-lightweight fixed full-face models to convertible helmets with removable chinbars. Each brand goes about its design goals differently, so there's a wide spread of weight, price and functionality to best suit the needs of any rider.

Know your enduro helmet

PEAK/VISOR

Peaks help keep the sun, rain and mud out of your eyes and should stable, rattle-free and adjustable for tilt. It also needs to look good and remain out of your peripheral vision when riding. Flexible materials and breakaway fixtures improve safety by preventing visors becoming a lever that can twist your neck in a crash.

VENTILATION

Ports or vents are essential to increase airflow over the head. Most helmets use a system of intake (front) and exhaust (rear) vents to channel air through internal grooves and regulate internal temperature. Used cleverly, vents can also reduce weight and improve looks.

GOGGLE/EYEWEAR STORAGE

The ability to park your goggles under the peak is useful if you're stopping and starting a lot. Rear goggle clips can be a bit of a gimmick though, considering elasticated straps with silicone grippers do an excellent job of staying put anyway. Some helmets also offer eyewear stow points that will be useful if you wear glasses rather than goggles.



CHINBAR ATTACHMENT

Removable chinguards allow switching between uphill and downhill modes in selected helmets. Each system has its own unique clamp mechanism, with the best versions fitting quickly and easily with the helmet in place. Safety standards on chinbars range from trail riding to full DH certification.



PADDING

Internal cushioning is essential to helmet stability and comfort, as well as heat management. Pads soak up a lot of sweat so should be removable for washing. Not all fabrics are equal in terms of next-to-skin comfort. Some lids rely on multiple pad densities to tune fit over heavier and more costly retention systems, and while thicker pads can be more comfy, they also run hotter.

CHINSTRAP

Securing the helmet safely is essential, but look for comfort and adjustability here and straps that aren't too itchy, flappy or dig in ears or the jawline. Many helmets use magnetic clasps to speed up installation, although simpler plastic buckles can sometimes be lighter and less obtrusive.

PROTECTION STANDARDS

All mountain bike helmets have to pass certification tests before they can be sold. Parameters include puncture resistance, strap integrity and handling impacts of different velocities. DH-certified helmets must resist higher impact energy loads, but require more material (and weight) to achieve this.



SAFETY FEATURES

As well as harder shells and multiple foam densities to absorb impacts of different velocities, many lids also offer extra rotational impact protection. The most popular is MIPS, which is a slippy plastic liner that slides independently of the outer shell to dissipate impact energy. Other variants exist too.

FIT ADJUSTMENT

A typical retention system takes the form of a compressible cradle that cinches down onto the scalp. The best will tighten one-handed, exert pressure evenly and be multi-adjustable in terms of tilt and circumference to suit all head shapes. Look for solid and sturdy adjusters too, as small plastic pieces are prone to damage over time.



BELL SUPER AIR R

£274.95

SPECIFICATION Weight: 674g (428g minus chinbar) • Sizes: S, M (tested), L • Seven colours • Contact: zyrofisher.co.uk

Bell already offers two top-scoring convertible helmets, and now this Super Air R, too. The all-new lid's standout feature is that it's much lighter and better ventilated than Bell's previous Super 3 and Super DH MIPS pair.

It uses Bell's 'Flex Spherical' protection, with dual foam layers tethered by squidgy elastomer buttons that allow each layer to rotate separately in an impact. This is also bolstered by a MIPS liner, where the slippery plastic cradle is able to twist independently of the main shell for more energy absorption, helping isolate the head in a rotational impact.

Of the two foam layers, the outer EPS liner uses a firmer density than the inner, which Bell claims absorbs impacts more effectively across a broader velocity range. With all this lot, it's fair to say the Super Air R hasn't scrimped on safety for the lofty £275 price.

The lid's twist-to-tighten retention system cinches up without wriggling, and you can change the height to alter interior dish and tilt. Fit and padding is extremely comfortable, and sizing is conventional.

The Air's removable chinbar fastens via two rear buckles. That's one buckle less than older

Bells, and was relatively easy to fix once we got used to lining up the slots in front of the ears. It took a little persistence to get it right every time, though, and it's definitely not as easy to learn as some.

With 26 vents, the Super Air feels incredibly light on the head and delivers copious airflow. Under the three-way adjustable peak, four brow slots are especially effective, funnelling cooling wind onto forehead and temples and drying sweat before it drips into eyes. The forward and peripheral vision is excellent too.

The chinbar isn't totally solid, so the vibe is definitely of a pumped-up trail lid rather than full-on enduro race lid. Bell's safety certification reflects this so look to the brand's Super DH if you're going big, or are accident prone!

That said, it is one of the best looking and functioning convertible helmets for trail riding. With the chinbar removed, it basically functions exactly like a normal trail lid.



Bell's new helmet is stylish, versatile, comfortable and lightweight. Being nowhere near as hot or restricting as a proper DH full-face, it's nailed the form and function as a trail or e-bike lid with added protection, but if you prioritise security over versatility, there are better options. It comes with a seriously hefty price tag too.



ENDURA MT500 FULL FACE

£189.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 644g • Sizes: S/M, M/L (tested), L/XL • Black, Forest Green • Contact: endurasport.com

Endura's new MT500 full-face is the lightest fully DH-certified product on test. With sculpted good looks, it's aimed at enduro racing or hitting downhill trails at full speed.

The fixed chinbar design means you can't remove it to increase airflow, so the MT500 relies on vents and intakes for sufficient all-day comfort. Having minimal padding inside aids cooling, but, especially around the brow and ears, there isn't as much airflow as rivals, so it runs a bit hotter than the competition and can get steamy on warmer days.

Endura helmets use Koroyd's honeycomb technology. The main structural part is made from welded-together, energy-absorbing, plastic tubes that can crush and deform in an impact. The chinguard uses an in-house designed internal skeleton structure for reinforcement, and an extra green Koroyd panel insert at the front. Presumably to save extra grams, the helmet has exposed polystyrene at the edges, brow and chinbar, which can get damaged by small stones firing up, or from knocks in transit.

The MT500 has passed stringent impact and stress tests for competitive DH and enduro racing. While it wouldn't be our first choice for the former, there's still a very solid, stiff and secure feel to the construction that's certainly

reassuring, and nice detailing too like metal visor bolts and cushy chinstrap padding. Endura's visor is lower than others and strayed into our line of sight at downhill speeds when trying to scope lines further down the trail.

In terms of fit, the MT500 is less deeply dished and sat more perched on our head, and we also experienced a few hot spots where the harder interior touched the skull, while the cheek pads pressed uncomfortably on our ears. These cheek pads can also wriggle loose, since they're only held in place by a small Velcro patch.

The multi-adjustable retention system uses an easy-to-twist dial and is comfy, but the cradle needs waggling right back before worming your head in. Even cinched up tight, the MT500 can rock a little front to back on the roughest trails. This was despite us testing the recommended M/L size, and the fact that it felt cramped, and tighter than some medium lids on test.



Endura's new lid is a decent price and good quality, but there are niggles. Significantly, it was neither as comfortable nor as cool as some rivals, especially for all-day use. So despite being the lightest DH-certified helmet on test, it had the hottest and most claustrophobic fit.



GIRO SWITCHBLADE

£269.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 957g (671g minus chinbar) • Sizes: S, M (tested), L • Three colours • Contact: zyrofisher.co.uk

Giro's Switchblade was one of the first helmets with a removable chinbar offering more protection for enduro and was quickly popularised by some of the fastest racers around, such as Richie Rude.

Like others here, it offers a MIPS liner to help reduce rotational impact damage, inside a tougher exterior. This liner is well integrated with the pads and able to twist independently of the outer shell in the event of a glancing blow. The Switchblade's exterior is certainly built tough, as it comes with full DH-certification against denting and piercing, and it feels plenty solid and sturdy.

Without the chinbar, the Switchblade's shape is unique, rocking what Giro labels a 'full-cut' style. Basically, the lid extends right down over the ears and almost to the side of the cheeks to offer significantly more coverage than a regular open-face lid in the event of an accident. It's a great option when you're looking for a bit more security, but don't want the extra heat or bulk of a downhill lid.

With buttons underneath, the chinbar is very easy to remove and fit, in part due to the extended cheek portion being visible when lining up the two pieces. With metal fixing tabs, it is also rock-solid, if a tad chunky, so you can feel the weight on the front of the helmet compared to when it's removed.

The brand's well-proven Roc Loc retention system cranks the helmet tight and grips the head evenly. All internal pads are well located and the interior shape is very comfortable. The Switchblade doesn't budge however hard you ride, but one drawback of being so locked down is it runs very hot. So toasty in fact, that it's best suited to colder weather only, especially if you sweat a lot.

The shell is well vented, with 20 ports overall feeding internal channels that aim to divert cooling air through the cheek pads, so it's likely the forehead area that makes it feel warmer. Above this zone, Giro's visor is flexible so it can handle knocks without breaking, and lifts high enough to stash goggles underneath.

The Switchblade's quality and finish is top notch, and Giro's lids last a long time before getting wrecked in everyday use. We love the look of the open Switchblade, but this is noticeably chunkier, heavier and hotter than



some of the newer generation convertibles and lightweight full-faces here. In regular trail lid mode it looks cool and offers a good halfway house in terms of protection, but it's more expensive, a lot less well ventilated and bulkier than a 'standard' extended rear coverage open-face helmet.

8

IXS TRIGGER FF

£199.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 679g • Sizes: S/M, M/L (tested) • Four colours • Contact: hotlines-uk.com

The brand new Trigger helmet from iXS is one of a new generation of super-lightweight, fully DH-certified full-face lids. The stealthy angular design is a fixed structure, so you can't remove the chinbar, but this ensures it tips the scales at a featherweight 680g, even in the biggest size offered.

The Trigger achieves this in part by a proprietary, patent-pending, 'X-Frame' construction inside the chinbar. It's essentially an internal roll-cage webbing moulded inside the EPS that reinforces crucial joints in the shell and is a structural part of the lid. This extends rearwards to just over the ears, and also enables massive vents to be shaped into the chinbar for extra airflow and cooling.

Another reason for the aggressive weight saving is a more basic offering in terms of protection. There's no rotational system like MIPS, or other own-brand alternatives. iXS relies on the more traditional in-moulded construction whereby expanded polystyrene is fused to a harder outer shell. It must be effective though, as the lid has passed extensive DH testing for impact resistance, fixing and security.

Ventilation here is ridiculously good, to the point the Trigger is actually cooler than plenty of open-face lids, and can even feel too chilly on long rides in wintry weather. This is a good

problem to have, however, seeing as you can always make yourself warmer. Such cooling and airiness comes without scrimping on comfort either, as internal padding is well positioned and feels super-cushy. Unobtrusive cheek pads come in two sizes, but can detach easily as their 'popper' fixing method isn't the most secure.

iXS's rotating rear dial is easy to use and covers a wide size range without putting any pressure or snag points on the skull — a trait that's very useful considering the Swiss brand doesn't offer as many size options as rivals. If you have a small or big head you're sorted, but we had to go for a M/L unit, despite being on the cusp of both measurements.

If iXS's skimpy sizing options do suit your head perfectly, this is a really unobtrusive full-face. It's super-lightweight and feels almost invisible on your head while riding, and, once cinched tight, there's no looseness or weight swinging around. Forwards and peripheral vision is excellent and it plays nicely with goggles.



With class-leading airflow for a DH-certified lid, the Trigger makes a convincing case for a permanent lightweight full-face, if you don't need the option to remove the chinbar for climbing on the hottest days. It's the joint best-ventilated helmet here with Bell's Super Air, and a well-sorted bit of kit.

9

KALI ALPINE

£229.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 887g • Sizes: XS, S, M (tested), L, XL • Three colours • Contact: kaliprotectives.com

Kali's reputation is built on putting safety first. The UK distributor explained that, for this exact reason, Kali doesn't offer a removable chinbar helmet, instead preferring to make the safest, lightest, helmet at any given price point in either fixed full or open-face mode. The full-face Alpine is still plenty light enough though, weighing less than most DH helmets and also convertible models like Giro's Switchblade and Sweet Protection's Arbitrator.

The brand's many proprietary technologies reflect its commitment to protection. The Alpine's visor is 'breakaway', and the internal construction uses 'LDL' (Low Density Layer) and 'Composite Fusion Plus'. These tongue twisters describe firstly a layer of viscoelastic pads under the padding, and secondly a thinner exterior shell moulded directly to a structure built from interlocking foam pyramids.

And if that sounds equally bewildering, the viscoelastic pads use an impact-hardening material (like D3O) that solidifies under impact, but also works like memory foam, shaping to the skull for extra comfort and reduced hotspots. The foam pyramid is formed of two layers of opposing, interlocking cone-shaped spikes. There are two densities of material used, and in an impact, these cones act as a progressive

damper to absorb different strike velocities. As they collapse, the cones also direct energy sideways and away from the brain.

The Alpine feels super solid and protective like a proper full-face, and is secured with a sturdy D-loop strap. It's fully lined with snug padding, and only has minimal, small vents, which make it by far the hottest helmet on test. Temperatures are equivalent to a regular DH lid then, but, by virtue of being around 200g lighter than even full carbon helmets, it's only this interior warmth that feels like a DH lid.

Even with the protective, locked-down feel, the Alpine feels very light on the head and the exterior silhouette and size isn't especially bulky either. We also felt really reassured by it being absolutely rock-solid on our head, so charging downhill on e-bikes during testing, there was a very locked-down feeling, with the Kali staying totally motionless no matter how wild the trails got. With this in mind, it would be our helmet of choice for Alpine riding or enduro racing if protection was a sole priority.



With excellent comfort, five sizes, a good price, refined finish and solid construction, Kali's Alpine has a lot going for it. Many riders will love the sense of security, but if you're a racer that runs hot and need an extremely airy lid, this isn't the one. Kali has a brand new Invader lid coming though, which is a super-lightweight full-face with a more open design and better cooling, so we're very keen to try it out.



MET PARACHUTE MCR

£300

SPECIFICATION Weight: 839g (461g minus chinbar) • Sizes: S, M (tested), L • Six colours • Contact: met-helmets.com

One of the original lightweight full-face helmets, Met's Parachute has been around for years. Over that time, it's seen multiple revisions, to the point we reckon this MCR version is by far the best looking, most sorted yet.

MCR refers to the new chinguard mechanism, which uses magnets to orientate 'plugs' into ports on the main helmet. The design work was done with Fidlock, whose reputation was forged making the magnetic chinstrap buckles featured on several helmets here, including this Met.

This magnetic chinbar attaches just behind the ears and is released by twisting two small, flip-up, dial wheels that 'pop' the guard free. It's reasonably solid in place, but wobbles and twists more than other convertibles here (with the exception of Bell's Super Air R). It's easy to install once you figure out the locators, but also bit vague, so we were never entirely sure when it was completely locked. Having said that, a quick jiggle of the chinbar was all that was needed to confirm the magnets had done their job and it was secure.

Padding, straps and retention dials are of the highest quality. The two cheek pads inside the chinbar are well positioned and feel snug without being constricting, which helps with the Met's stable, planted feel. The BOA cradle has

really precise increments, and the MIPS integration and plastic webbing is all well designed. A huge peak out front is flexy and can be tipped up right out of sight, which means goggles will fit underneath easily too.

A neat design touch is how the front of the wraparound BOA headband sits slightly away from the outer shell, allowing a small gap for extra airflow between the exterior and padded webbing. It's a small detail, but extra effective at cooling the brow. Elsewhere, Met's 21 vents direct loads of air inside, especially down the sides and over ears. However, the interior's still marginally warmer than a couple of helmets here.

Run in open-face mode, the temple zone feels slightly roomier than most medium lids, but the retention system dials in slack uniformly and comfortably. Three different height positions ensure tilt can be tuned perfectly too, and the Parachute stays firmly put in either trail or full-face mode. It should last well too, since it's fully wrapped with tougher material.



While at £300, it isn't cheap, the Met's quality and finish is top-notch; it feels properly sturdy and Alpine-ready in full-face mode. Factor in the good-looking open-face mode, and it's a very versatile combination.



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SWEET PROTECTION ARBITRATOR

£269

SPECIFICATION Weight: 1,018g (549g minus chinbar) • Sizes: S/M, M/L (tested), L/XL • Colour: Black, blue, green • Contact: jungleproducts.co.uk

Norwegian brand Sweet Protection's new Arbitrator full-face is really streamlined at the sides, angular and futuristic-looking. It's a two-piece convertible lid that has a unique fixing system pairing the open-face portion with a full carbon chinbar.

Sweet's raft of safety features include low-density EPS foam inside (that claims better impact absorption than denser polystyrene), along with raised 'bridges' and sunken 'channels' to help soak up any smashes if you get too wild. A four-piece shell uses variable densities of polycarbonate, and also hides a Zytel nylon 'skeletal' reinforcing framework inside. The removable chinbar is pre-preg carbon-fibre to save weight and resist heavy impacts. And all this added together yields a full DH-certified protection rating as a full-face.

The Arbitrator also packs the industry-leading MIPS system with its low-friction plastic liner. Two sets of pad thickness on top of this are included, and the tensioning band cinches all the way round the head for more even pressure distribution. These pads feel really silky against the skin, are well positioned and especially comfy at the rear on the fit-tuning plastic dial

that can also adjust the helmet's dish.

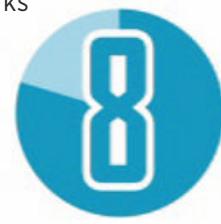
Venting is plentiful and most effective above the ears where triangulated ports funnel air over arteries to cool blood at the temples. Testing in Italy at 30°C, cooling and ventilation was excellent, with good sweat absorption, so it never got overly steamy inside.

The Arbitrator is formed from distinct upper and lower halves, rather than front and rear segments, so the way the carbon chinguard attaches is unique. The lower carbon piece overlaps the 'open face' portion with carbon tabs that slot inside it. The pair lock and unlock with a single rear compression lever that's reassuringly chunky, and there's a small security tab to prevent it being knocked open accidentally.

This design means both parts have dedicated straps. DH-mode uses a much beefier, padded ratchet system chinstrap that's very comfy, and open-face mode gets a lighter plastic clasp. A significant drawback to this, however, is the trail helmet's chinstrap needs folding and stashing in

internal rubber pouches before reattaching the chinguard. It's essential to remove the lid to do this, making it slower than others to convert.

The Arbitrator looks great and has good cooling, but it's also the heaviest lid here at over a kilo. To be fair, it works extremely well as a full-face and is cooler than most. The 'open face' part is less convincing and feels weighty, overly top heavy, and perched.



TROY LEE STAGE

£275

SPECIFICATION Weight: 702g • Sizes: XS/S, M/L (tested), XL/XXL • Six colours • Contact: saddleback.co.uk

Troy Lee was early to offer alternatives to the road cycling-inspired helmets that used to dominate mountain biking. In fact, as far back as the 1990s, it pioneered lids with extra coverage for aggressive riders, of which this Stage is a natural heir.

Designed to be ultra-lightweight and have better ventilation than a regular full-face, the Stage is still fully DH-certified. To achieve this protection rating, it uses dual-density EPP/EPS foam layers in the main structure, with each material type better handling a different impact velocity. There's also a slippery MIPS liner under the internal pads that reduces force from rotational impacts before it gets to your brain.

Troy Lee's lid goes the route of a fixed, rather than removable, chinguard. This arguably reduces versatility, but enables weight saving (at comparable stiffness levels) and also better ventilation. There are 11 intake and 14 exhaust ports in total, forcing air very effectively through the internal channels and over your scalp.

All this airflow ensures effective cooling, so it's one of the airier helmets on test, despite being very cushy and padded. The Stage relies on a variety of different-thickness liner pads, rather than an adjustable retention webbing,

to tune fit, and spare anti-bacterial pads are included in the helmet bag. These well-positioned pads make the interior comfortable, but it's also aided by a nicely dished-out shape that fitted a wide variety of head shapes.

Stable, and with no annoying fore and aft rocking, the Stage also feels light with no internal pressure points or too much bulk swinging around. It soaks up sweat effectively and doesn't run too hot either. You can occasionally feel the chinstrap if you cinch it tightly, as it sits very close to the rear of the jawbone, and the Stage doesn't have a full shell wrap on the underside. To be fair though, this is likely a conscious choice to keep the weight down to just over 700g, and only small areas of EPS are exposed, covered with a tougher coating that highlights Troy Lee's attention to detail.

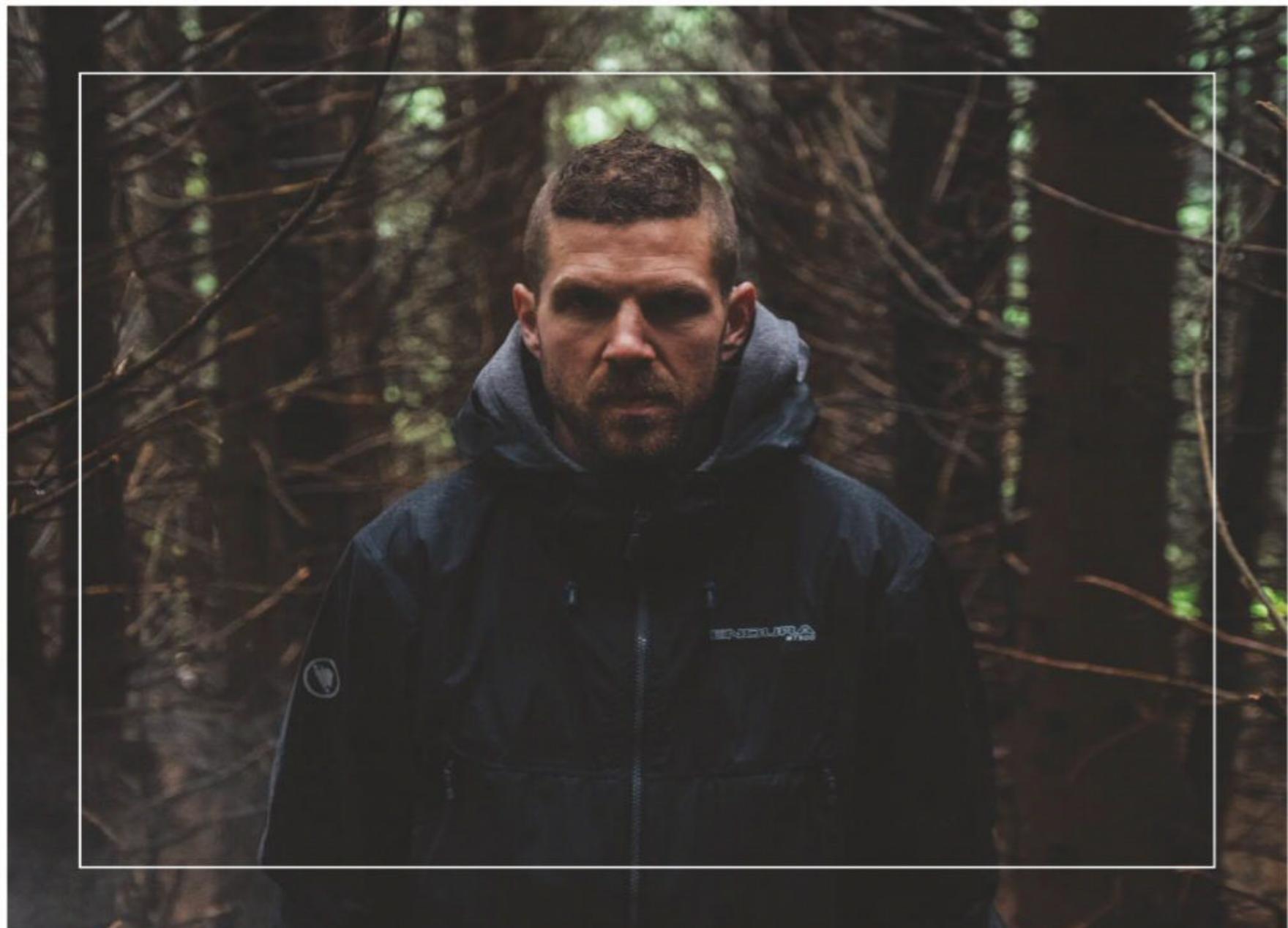
Being quite close-fitting helps with the great looks, and is achieved by using less material, so protection levels are reduced compared to a full-bore 'DH' full-face. Also, there are large ventilation holes that could be skewered by



branches or stones if you're really unlucky.

Rock-solid when shredding, and delivering good airflow and comfort, the Stage is totally dialled, but pricey. It's easy to find at a discount, however, which makes it pretty enticing as a fixed, lightweight full-face if you don't want to go the convertible route.





Dan Atherton has been knocked down and out, but always got back in the ring again.

Anyone who has witnessed a World Cup downhill race will realise that it falls squarely into the category of dangerous sports which come with a risk of serious injury. There's zero run-off in wooded sections and there's no air-fence to cushion your fall should you take a tumble in a rock garden or misjudge a gap jump. Every competitor has to face the fact that there's a real risk of getting badly beaten up. You will crash. You will get hurt, there will be bruises, no matter how well protected you are.

Why did he go on after repeatedly hurting himself - and, in particular after breaking his neck?

It's a question that elicits a Dan Atherton trademark pause. "Hmmm. It's hard to say...it was just...passion really. It's passion that makes you get up at five or six in the morning to go training. It was just impossible to put the bike down. The thing is riding downhill is something that is so much a part of you, ingrained so deeply, that you can't stop."

The eldest of the three Atherton siblings is a reflective soul. You get the strong feeling that he is a steady presence in the Atherton Clan, but his exterior calm shouldn't be interpreted as a blissed out state, because riding downhill always meant facing up to a potential beating from an unyielding opponent.

He is still a formidable driving force behind the scenes of the race team but these days Atherton measures himself against his fearsome engineering in the Welsh hills rather than against the clock on the World Cup circuit. An undisputed track visionary and a king of trail construction, but the challenge is fundamentally the same, you are going head-to-head with a scary opponent, risking a battering from the terrain. He now pits his design wit as well as his skills, nerve and fitness against the mountain, and, although he's been knocked down a few times, he's not ready to stop riding or digging, not anytime soon.

Dan Atherton wears Endura's award winning MT500 collection.

RENEGADE PROGRESS



ENDURA

Conclusion

The choice of lightweight helmets suitable for tackling gnarly terrain has skyrocketed recently, and there are loads of excellent products here. Prices have risen too, and many of us will baulk at paying £300 for a lightweight/convertible full-face, especially if we own (or want) a pure DH or lighter open-face helmet already.

That makes it harder than ever to single out a helmet to recommend, but the unanimous favourite among our testers was the Troy Lee Stage. It's well vented and lightweight, to the point where it's like wearing a trail lid with added protection — perfect when you want to push your limits and not risk smashing your face up. iXS's Trigger



Bell Super Air: versatile performer but not up to the roughest stuff



Full Face is also sorted and offers even more in the way of ventilation, but lacks a few extra features like MIPS.

Bell's Super Air R does exactly what the brand claims, but the price is high and the helmet is considerably less sturdy and solid compared to other convertibles like Met's excellent Parachute or Giro's heavier Switchblade. The Parachute is arguably the most versatile and well-rounded product here, but it's also the top-dollar helmet with a £300 asking price.

Endura's latest MT500 proved a bit of a disappointment, and Sweet Protection's Arbitrator works fantastically as a lightweight full-face, but has issues when used as a trail lid — in terms of speed of conversion — and is heavy. Kali's Alpine is light and feels really protective, but not much better ventilated than a regular DH lid so feels like a bit of an outlier in this company. We're excited to try the brand's new Invader lid to see if it better fits the bill. So although we picked a winner, all of the helmets here impressed in different ways, and all of them come recommended to varying degrees.

	Price	Weight	Sizes	Contact	Rating
Bell Super Air R	£274.95	674g	S, M, L	zyrofisher.co.uk	9
Endura MT500 Full Face	£189.99	644g	S/M, M/L, L/XL	endurasport.com	7
Giro Switchblade	£269.99	957g	S, M, L	zyrofisher.co.uk	8
iXS Trigger FF	£199.99	679g	S/M, M/L	hotlines-uk.com	9
Kali Alpine	£229.99	887g	XS, S, M, L, XL	kaliprotectives.com	8
Met Parachute MCR	£300	839g	S, M, L	met-helmets.com	9
Sweet Protection Arbitrator	£269	1,018g	S/M, M/L, L/XL	jungleproducts.co.uk	8
Troy Lee Stage	£275	702g	XS/S, M/L, XL/XXL	saddleback.co.uk	9

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BOUTIQUE BRITISH HARDTAILS

With classic frame materials, top-quality parts and modern geometry, our trio of test bikes from Cotic, Pace and Ribble may be hardtails but they're anything but humble

Words & photos: Mick Kirkman



TESTED
THIS
MONTH



COTIC BFE GOLD

£3,102



PACE RC 627 GX

£3,179.99



RIBBLE HT TI GX

£3,289



B

ack in the October issue we tested four of the best British hardtails for under £1,700. All had alloy frames and all were designed right here in the UK. This month we've upped the ante with three boutique British hardtails from Pace, Cotic and Ribble.

The Cotic and Pace are manufactured from high-end steel tubing, while Ribble's first mountain bike in over 20 years boasts a raw titanium frame. And with price tags in excess of £3k, all come smartly dressed with top-end kit.

Aimed squarely at riders who crave the unadulterated connection to the trail that only a hardtail can provide, the top-level specifications should really showcase the ride quality of the frame materials and geometry, as the parts certainly aren't the limiting factor here.

Our trio also reflect how 27.5in hardtails haven't been immune to the longer, lower, slacker enduro trend that has swept through the full-suspension category. So, just as suspension

bikes adapted to the discipline's racing needs by becoming more stable, the best hardtails have done the same.

These rangier rigs are easier to ride fast, because the extra stability makes it harder to get bucked off line, and helps counter any pitching you get on repeated hits. And, guess what? That's even more useful when you don't have rear suspension to iron out creases in the trail.

It's no surprise then, that all three of the brands here know that a little extra 'give' goes a long way on a hardtail frame, which is why they use steel and titanium instead of aluminium. Used correctly, these materials tend to have greater compliance and different damping characteristics to aluminium, which can help absorb vibrations while still maintaining the raw, reactive ride that's unique to a hardtail.

Rolling on 27.5in wheels, and with nothing more than a tyre's width of rubber and air to comfort you from rock and root, these rigid frames feel more direct under power than any full-suspension bike, injecting life into even the dullest trails. But there are other crucial differences too. Hardtail geometry changes more while riding, as the bike essentially pivots around the rear axle as the fork compresses. This can get unsettling if fork travel is too long, or if the static head angle isn't slack enough to compensate for the additional sag. With all three of the bikes in this test sporting 150mm forks, it will be interesting to see how this plays out.

Another consideration with hardtail frame design is balancing the BB height to give a

riding position similar to full-suspension bikes, that naturally compress in corners, against crank clearance while climbing and pedalling. Having tested numerous hardtails, we've come to the conclusion that a good recipe for BB height is basically as low as possible, before it causes frequent pedal strikes. So that's something we'll be considering when testing these boutique hardtails. But enough of the theory, let's dive straight in and find out which bike delivers in practice.

WHERE AND HOW

Tale of the test

Testing in December felt like the perfect time for hardtails. With most rides ending with filthy kit and an urgent need to jet wash bikes as much as yourself, it's clear where hardtails gain an advantage, with no bearings or links to act as potential mud pockets.

Getting them dirty in the first place involved a selection of off-piste runs at local trail centres, linked by some beaten-up armoured trails that really revealed each frame's ability to absorb trail chatter. The trio also got treated to a local jump spot that's littered with mini DH-style trails and short, action-packed runs that really allowed us to focus on the nuances of handling.

Top-level specs should really showcase the ride quality of the frame materials



ESCAPE
THE EVERYDAY

ALL-NEW
Ribble **HT Ti**

Full specs, geometry,
suggested builds & RRP's:
ribblecycles.co.uk



Custom build with BikeBuilder | 0% Finance | Cycle to Work Scheme Available

Reynolds 853 down tube and oversized, heat-treated seat tube form the foundation of a rock-solid chassis

No bottle bosses on the seat tube makes it easy to fit longer dropper posts

The Bfe frame is rated for use with any fork from 100-160mm travel

Hope brakes with floating rotors are a £200+ upgrade



COTIC BFE GOLD

£3,102

SPECIFICATION

Frame Reynolds 853/cro-mo

Fork Cane Creek Helm Air, 150mm travel

Wheels Hunt Enduro hubs, Hunt Enduro Wide rims, WTB Vigilante/Tail Boss 27.5x2.6in tyres

Drivetrain SRAM GX Eagle 32t chainset, SRAM GX r-mech and shifter

Brakes Hope Tech 3 X2, 180mm

Components Cotic Calver 780mm bar, Cotic Short 35mm stem, X-Fusion Manic Stealth 150mm post, Cotic saddle

Sizes S, M, L, XL

Weight 13.65kg (30.1lb)

Contact cotic.co.uk

GEOMETRY

Size tested M

Head angle 64.1°

Seat angle 74.1°

BB height 327mm

Chainstay 429mm

Front centre 772mm

Wheelbase 1,201mm

Down tube 710mm

Top tube 635mm

Reach 463mm

For 2020, Cotic's Bfe has been revamped. The head angle is now a full degree slacker for more control, while a steeper seat tube improves the climbing position. The latest frame also has a lowered top tube that really boosts standover clearance, and, at 463mm, the reach on the size medium is generous, extending to a whopping 609mm on the new extra large size.

At £549 for the frame only, the Bfe is still competitively priced, given that it retains a Reynolds 853 steel down tube and heat-treated cro-mo elsewhere. To increase stiffness, the top tube is ovalised and gusseted underneath. A traditional threaded BB with ISCG 05 mounts sits at the base of an oversized 35mm seat tube.

To the rear, curved, bridgeless stays are welded to compact dropouts that are secured by a Syntace X-12 Boost axle, which employs an expanding wedge for extra wheel security.

SUSPENSION

To get the Cane Creek Helm fork you need to drop an extra £300, but we think it's worth it. Sporting 150mm travel and stout 35mm upper tubes, it's air-sprung, with three-way damping adjustment.

Extra support can be gained by opening the upper leg and twisting a wingnut that moves a piston to reduce the positive spring volume. Delving deeper, you can also tweak the balance between the positive and negative air chambers for a different spring feel. If you're prepared to experiment, it's a sorted piece of kit that's every bit the match for RockShox's top-level Pike Ultimate on the Pace.

COMPONENTS

Cotic offers Hunt Enduro Wide wheels as an option over the Hope Fortus 26 or 35, and this is our second recommendation. For the same price, they feel zingier, stiffer and faster, with rims rocking extra thick sidewalls and more spokes at the rear for extra strength where it's needed most. And yet they are still the lightest wheels on test.

Shod with the latest WTB G2 Series tyres, consisting of a Vigilante 2.5in Light/High Grip front and a Trail Boss 2.4in Tough/Fast Rolling rear, it's a great combo for balancing grip and speed, even if both tyres lost air over the test duration; be sure you have extra sealant.

We've been impressed by X-Fusion's latest dropper with its light action and solid remote. SRAM's GX Eagle 12-speed drivetrain shifts smoothly, and while Cotic uses longer 175mm cranks, the Bfe has plenty of ground clearance.

PERFORMANCE

Our first impression was that the bar height on the Bfe felt too low. So we'd prefer more headset spacers, especially if shelling out extra cash on the Cane Creek Helm upgrade. After digging a little deeper, however, we quickly realised that this sensation is a consequence of the elevated 327mm BB height. Thankfully, it didn't really hamper the steering or handling too much. The slack head angle feels spot on when linking turns and the Bfe steers neutrally, so it was easy to adapt to and ride confidently straight away.

With no excessive elasticity or twang, the steel frame is solid if a little dull. This directness is a positive though,

since it's reactive and stiff without being so intractable that it rattles fillings or induces headaches, even on long rock-strewn descents. Cane Creek's silky Helm fork plays a big part in that. The extra support also reduced forward pitching on steeper descents, partially compensating for the instability of the taller BB.

Fitted with those Hunt wheels, the Bfe is a fast bike, the rapid acceleration putting wind in the Cotic's sail along twisty singletrack, despite it not being the lightest in test. So the Bfe has a twinkle in its eye and real sense of charm that helps get you past the fact it's not the most ground-hugging machine, nor the lightest on test.

VERDICT

Cotic's new Bfe is much improved. The steeper seat angle ensures a seated riding position that's balanced and efficient for pedalling, and the steel frame is rock solid. Thankfully, there's enough suppleness too, so it's not too jarring or uncomfortable on long days in the saddle.

The Bfe is at its best bombing along beaten-up jeep tracks and bridleways though, as the higher bottom bracket holds it back a bit on steeper, twisty and more challenging downhill trails as the riding position is much less composed compared to the Pace RC627.





HIGHS

Bombproof chassis feel without being ridiculously stiff



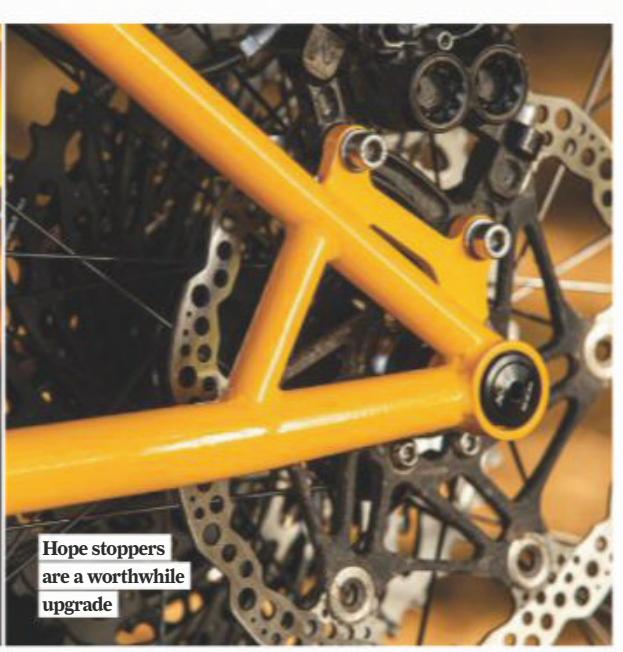
LOWS

Still needs a much lower bottom bracket

Cotic's Bfe takes an unashamedly beefy approach



Reynolds 853 down tube and gusseted top tube



Hope stoppers are a worthwhile upgrade

Ample tyre clearance
inside the slender
rear stays

800m Rental bar
and Pace's new
35mm stem make
for a great cockpit

With the reduced offset
Pike fork, the 64° head
angle feels like the
sweet spot — not too
sluggish, not too light

Dialled geometry
offers the perfect
feel and fit



PACE RC 627 ULTIMATE GX

£3,179.99

SPECIFICATION

Frame Reynolds 853/cro-mo

Fork RockShox Pike Ultimate, 150mm travel

Wheels Hope Pro 4 hubs, Hope Fortus 35 rims, Schwalbe Magic Mary/Hans Dampf 27.5x2.35in tyres

Drivetrain SRAM GX Eagle 32t chainset, GX Eagle r-mech and shifter

Brakes SRAM Guide R, 180mm

Components Renthal Fatbar 35 800mm, Pace 35mm stem, RockShox Reverb 150mm post, Charge Spoon saddle

Sizes M, L, XL

Weight 13.7kg (30.2lb)

Contact pacecycles.com

GEOMETRY

Size tested L

Head angle 63.9°

Seat angle 73.8°

BB height 299mm

Chainstay 425-438mm

Front centre 793mm

Wheelbase 1,218-1,231mm

Down tube 748mm

Top tube 655mm

Reach 475mm

The RC 627 is Yorkshire-based Pace's no-nonsense 27.5in steel hardtail. But should you desire larger hoops, there's also a 29er version called, not surprisingly, the RC 529.

For 2020 the 27.5in frame has become 1x-only, inherited a lower top tube, a one degree slacker head angle and similarly steepened seat tube. It's made from an interesting mix of materials too. The front triangle is Reynolds 853 tubing while the rear stays are cro-mo steel with 6082 aluminium dropouts thrown in for good measure. Or, to be more precise, the alloy dropouts are slotted and allow 13mm of chainstay adjustment, from 425mm to 438mm.

Like most steel frames, the Pace RC 627 has a traditional threaded BB. Bosses on the down tube house the fully external gear and brake housing. Not only is the full-length gear outer easier to maintain, all of the cables are tucked neatly out of the way, their position making it much more comfortable to shoulder the bike. Yes, the dropper hose is a bit floppy, and the RC 627 could probably do with an additional non-drive side clip to secure it.

SUSPENSION

With 150mm travel, the new RockShox Pike Ultimate fork is befitting of any high-end build. It gets the Charger II damper first developed for the big-hitting Lyrik, so it has both high and low-speed compression adjustment. Its action is super-plush and supportive. Pace also uses a shorter 37mm offset crown, which perfectly balances the

slack 64° head angle to stop it feeling too floppy at lower speeds.

COMPONENTS

Hope Fortus 35s use wider rims than the 30s but they are also a fair bit lighter. The extra width means they can easily handle fatter 2.8in tyres, and the frame has plenty of mud clearance if you want to upsize — either for extra traction, comfort or even pedal clearance. In fact, the shorter 170mm SRAM GX Eagle cranks are very sensible given how low the RC 627's BB is.

Talking of wheels, the 2020 spec has now been changed to include Hunt Trail Wide wheels and Maxxis Minion DHF/DHR tyres at no extra cost. That's a win-win in our view.

Pro 4 Hope hubs are proven UK kit, but the rear DT RWS axle unwound slightly multiple times during testing. Huge lateral forces go through aggressive hardtails, but it needed cranking up super-tight and the prime culprit for this issue is flex in the adjustable dropouts.

Guide R brakes are no-frills in terms of adjustment, but plenty sharp enough in action with the lightweight, cutaway, Aztec rotors on the RC 627.

PERFORMANCE

On the first ride, the rear brake on the RC 627 had air trapped inside and stopped working properly so we ended up riding several steep, hand-cut tracks in sloppy conditions with a rear wheel that wouldn't stop.

On some hardtails, it might have been game over, but with the super-smooth Pike Ultimate fork and

geometry that's as confident and stable as Pace's, we actually had a ton of fun anyway, and not only survived, but thrived in the mud.

This is down to the RC 627 being totally at home pointed down rooty, slippery off-piste trails. It's equally adept at railing corners and ruts too, without getting deflected or making you feel like you're teetering over the bike.

With the adjustable stays in the shortest position, it's easy to lift the front wheel, with seemingly no penalty when it comes time to smashing through braking bumps and roots.

If your idea of fun is being urged to go faster down challenging trails, this is definitely the bike for you.

VERDICT

Even though the geometry differences between our three test bikes were quite small, it's surprising how different the Pace RC 627 felt. It's stable, has completely neutral steering and the weight distribution is very balanced. Even flat-out, it never feels sketchy.

The Pace isn't the most eager uphill, but the pay-off on the way down more than makes up for it. The Pace never had us wondering 'what if...' and there were no little niggles to spoil the fun. The RC 627 is the complete package then and the clear winner despite the hefty price tag.



TEST
WINNER!
mbr

HIGHS

Balanced handling that makes you ride faster

LOWS

Messy dropper post routing

Reynolds 853 steel front triangle

Skinny cro-mo seat stays with rack bosses

Slotted alloy dropouts offer 13mm of chainstay adjustment





RIBBLE HT TI GX

£3,289

SPECIFICATION

Frame 3Al/2.5V triple-butted titanium

Fork RockShox Pike Select + 150mm travel

Wheels Hope Pro 4 110/148mm hubs, Hope Fortus 30 rims, Maxxis Minion 3C DHR II 27.5x2.6in tyres

Drivetrain SRAM GX Eagle, 32t chainset, GX r-mech and shifter

Brakes SRAM Guide R, 180/160mm

Components

Race Face Chester 800mm bar, Race Face Chester 40mm stem, Level 150mm dropper post, WTB Koda Race saddle

Sizes S, M, L, XL

Weight: 13.2kg (29.1lb)

Contact ribblecycles.co.uk

GEOMETRY

Size tested L

Head angle 63.3°

Seat angle 71.9°

BB height 322mm

Chainstay 430mm

Front centre 799mm

Wheelbase 1,229mm

Down tube 735mm

Top tube 650mm

Reach 473mm

This is Ribble's first mountain bike in almost 20 years, but you'd never guess looking at the beautifully crafted titanium frame with its fancy gussets and swoopy back end. The angles are far from dated either — the HT Ti boasting the slackest head angle and longest wheelbase on test.

It's light too. The smoothly welded 3Al/2.5V triple-butted titanium frame weighing a scant 2.1kg in size medium. No surprise then, that it is also the lightest bike on test.

It's the only frame on test with internally routed cables, trading a cleaner look for occasional rattle. This also makes it harder to plumb in the rear brake if you go with the frame-only option. Mud clearance isn't as plentiful as its rivals, but it's adequate for foul conditions, even with 2.6in Maxxis tyres.

SUSPENSION

The 2020 RockShox Pike on the Ribble is the Select + model, rather than the Ultimate version found on the Pace. It gets a Charger 2.1 damper inside though, just minus the independent high and low-speed compression adjustment. The new DebonAir air spring on the Pike has a tweaked negative/positive ratio, and combined with the low-friction SKF seals it's super-supple off-the-top.

Just like the Cotic and Pace, the Ribble is rocking 150mm travel, where the slack 63.3° head angle and 1,229mm wheelbase help mitigate any adverse swings in geometry as the fork compresses. Slack geometry means you can run the fork a little softer for extra grip without negatively impacting the steering.

COMPONENTS

The Race Face Chester 780mm bar and forged 40mm stem are flex-free, but the remote for the Level 150mm dropper isn't, so it feels soft and mushy in use; a trait that got worse when the anodising on the post got scratched by grit.

Weighing over 2.3kg, Hope's Fortus 30 wheels are heavy. Granted they were designed for downhill racing, with the bonus of being totally bombproof, but there's no ignoring the rotating weight of the rims. So even with smooth, reliable Pro 4 hubs, the wheels feel noticeably harder to accelerate. The 30mm internal rim width does support the fatter 2.6in Maxxis Minion 3C DHR II tyres nicely at lower pressures, laying down a footprint of grippy rubber for enhanced traction on, and off, the brakes.

Yes, the SRAM Guide R brakes aren't quite as smooth to the touch as the RS model with its swinglink cam, but modulation is still good, even if the smaller 160mm rear rotor is not the best for killing pace rapidly.

PERFORMANCE

With the most relaxed steering geometry, Ribble's HT Ti can hold an impressively straight line through rough rocks and chunder at speed. It's also roomy enough to shift your weight freely about the bike to correct line choice errors and adjust body position as the terrain dictates.

When you're not dropping your heels and hanging off the back, the 322mm BB height makes the bike feel too tall. So it's not as reactive to the flicky moves required to avoid obstacles or bounce from one side of the trail to the other.

This might also be due to flex — the frame exhibiting that titanium hallmark of being a little softer and more compliant than steel or alloy. Even with a gusset between the curvy seatstays and extra reinforcement at the bottom bracket junction, flex is noticeable leaning hard into corners, and also when stomping on the pedals.

Unfortunately this flexier feel doesn't translate to a smoother ride when trails get more chopped up and rocky. Both of the steel bikes in this test feel more damped, and isolated the rider better from vibrations. In fact, even though Cotic's Bfe is pretty chunky and solid, there's still less feedback transmitted to your hands and feet.

VERDICT

Ribble's new HT Ti hardtail has modern geometry, beautiful welds and looks fantastic. With sorted parts, the price is good value too.

When it comes to ride quality, however, Ribble's rig is good, but other brands with more experience tuning frame tubing offer more dialled handling, and a sweeter stiffness and compliance balance.

So while Ribble's debut shows promise, and we wouldn't bet against the brand improving fast, the wonder material hasn't delivered the ride quality to match its progressive attitude.





HIGHS

Slack, low
and long with
a beautiful
finishing quality
and details



LOWS

Titanium's softer
quality, married
to stretched-out
modern geometry,
equals a flexier
frame

Titanium frames
remain a benchmark
for aesthetics

Stylish gussets,
but stiffness could
be improved

Ribble has opted for
swooping retro-
style seatstays

Conclusion

Bombing down a trail on a hardtail is completely engaging. You sense every little ripple and undulation through your feet, and if you pump or pedal there's no delay; acceleration is instantaneous. We're also convinced that hardtails are a great way to sharpen your skills: as they are inherently harder to control, you quickly develop ninja-like reflexes. But you probably know all of this already. What you're here for is to find out which boutique British hardtail is worthy of your hard-earned.

On paper our three test bikes are pretty similar. All share broadly similar prices and geometry, but riding a variety of trails quickly highlighted significant differences between them. And we're not talking about frame materials, as differences in frame shape and rider balance will always influence handling more than material choice. In fact, tyre choice and pressure overrule slight nuances in vibration damping and stiffness from one frame to the other. And, for this reason, Pace's latest RC627, with its super-low BB height that delivers a glued-to-the-floor, super-stable feel, was our favourite; particularly when slashing through corners or blasting down trails.

It didn't hurt that Pace's frame is also smooth and calm hammering across repeated root webs or rocks, a sensation amplified by the calm and composed RockShox Pike Ultimate fork. On both the Pace and Ribble, however, Hope's new Fortus wheels feel significantly worse than Hunt's Enduro Wides on the Cotic that are zippier and livelier.

Cotic's Bfe has come a long way in recent years, and with the previous generation's niggles tweaked, it now offers a dynamic and engaging ride. With the steeper seat angle, the seated climbing position is now in a sweet spot over the cranks, and there's some sorted kit too, including a really impressive Cane Creek Helm fork. Bottom line, however, is it still has a lofty BB that leaves you a tad upright, less 'in' the bike and more disconnected from the trail.

So that just leaves Ribble's HT. It has got good geometry, but doesn't

Pace's RC627, with its super-low BB height, delivered a glued-to-the-floor, super-stable feel



Cotic's Bfe is high-octane bridleway basher



Ribble's slick Ti frame trumps its ride



feel sorted on the trails. It's hard to pinpoint the issue, but we suspect it's a consequence of the titanium frame being less stiff and precise, the progressive geometry and sizing stretching the material beyond its limits so you never feel confident reaching yours. There are plenty of positives to draw on though, with modern geometry and sizing, and also how the frame's construction and welding appears to be top notch. Ribble also has a steel model coming soon and that material may well better suit the long, stretched-out frame shape of modern hardtails, so we'll report back on that as soon as we can.

For now though, if you're in the market for a boutique British hardtail, we can't recommend the Pace RC627 highly enough. It's got the ride quality and specification to back up the geometry, and with that sleek, slender look that only steel provides, we suspect it will rapidly become a modern classic.

RANGE FINDER

Our test winner's stablemates

PACE RC 627 (CHASSIS)

£1,789

Got a drivetrain, brakes and cockpit already? If so, then the rolling chassis could be right up your bridleway. With a RockShox Lyrik fork (ignore the Fox fork pictured, the spec has since changed), Hope headset and Hunt wheels, it represents a big saving over the complete bike.



PACE RC 529

£3,179.99

The brand's big-wheeler looks just as progressive as the 27.5in version that won this test. The price is the same and the spec is identical apart from the size of the wheels. You can even choose to spec Hunt wheels and Maxxis tyres at no extra cost. So if you want the same level of ride quality, but prefer the idea of 29in wheels, go for the Pace RC 529.



**TEST
WINNER!**

mbr

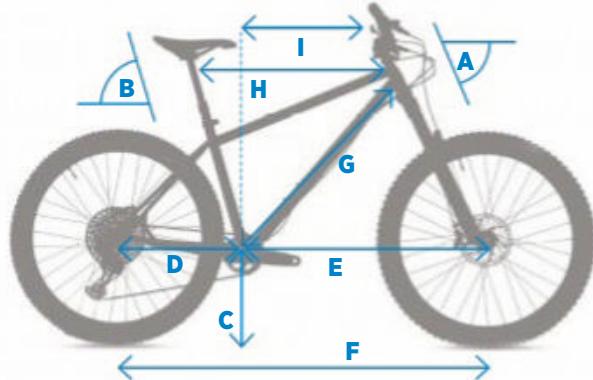
Pace's high-end hardtail
is a thrillingly sure-
footed trail ripper

NOTES ON THE NUMBERS

The lowdown on BB height

With only front suspension to cushion and stabilise the rider and chassis, geometry really is king on hardtails. Subtle differences of a degree here and there, and a few millimetres difference in sizing, can significantly shift the rider's centre of gravity, or hands in relation to feet.

A large contributory factor to Pace's 627 fun factor was having the lowest bottom bracket height on test. At 299mm from the ground, the amount of drop beneath the axles is that much greater than the others on test. The end result is that your rider mass is lower, so overall stability increases, and you feel less rattled around whatever the trail chuckles at you. Also, because you are closer to the ground, you have a more secure base from which to get really dynamic when slashing turns.



	Cotic	Pace	Ribble
A Head angle	64.1°	63.9°	63.3°
B Seat angle	74.1°	73.8°	71.9°
C BB height	327mm	299mm	322mm
D Chainstay	429mm	425-438mm	430mm
E Front centre	772mm	793mm	799mm
F Wheelbase	1,201mm	1,218-1,231mm	1,229mm
G Down tube	710mm	748mm	735mm
H Top tube	635mm	655mm	650mm
I Reach	463mm	475mm	473mm

SPECIFICATION

This month's bikes at a glance

Make/model	Cotic Bfe Gold	RC 627 GX Ultimate	Ribble HT Ti GX
Price	£3,102	£3,179.99	£3,289
Weight	13.65kg (30.1lb)	13.7kg (30.2lb)	13.2kg (29.1lb)
Contact	cotic.co.uk	pacecycles.com	ribblecycles.co.uk
FRAME			
Sizes	S, M, L, XL	M, L, XL	S, M, L, XL
Size tested	M	L	L
Frame material	Reynolds 853/cro-mo	Reynolds 853/cro-mo	3AL/2.5V Titanium
Suspension fork	Cane Creek Helm Air	RockShox Pike Ultimate	RockShox Pike Select +
Rear shock	N/A	N/A	N/A
Front travel	150mm	150mm	150mm
Rear travel	N/A	N/A	N/A
WHEELS			
Hubs	Hunt 110/148mm	Hope Pro 4 110/148mm	Hope Pro 4 110/148mm
Rims	Hunt Enduro Wide	Hope Fortus 30	Hope Fortus 30
Spokes	Stainless steel	Stainless steel	Stainless steel
Tyres	WTB G2 Vigilante/Trail Boss 27.5x2.6in	Schwalbe Magic Mary/Hans Dampf Addix Soft 27.5x2.35in	Maxxis Minion 3C DHR II 27.5x2.6in
GROUPSET			
Shifters	SRAM GX Eagle 1x12	SRAM GX Eagle 1x12	SRAM GX Eagle 1x12
Cassette	SRAM GX Eagle 10-50t	SRAM GX Eagle 10-50t	SRAM GX Eagle 10-50t
Rear mech	SRAM GX Eagle	SRAM GX Eagle	SRAM GX Eagle
Crank	SRAM GX Eagle, 32t	SRAM GX Eagle, 32t	SRAM GX Eagle, 32t
Bottom bracket	SRAM DUB BSA	SRAM DUB BSA	SRAM DUB BSA
Brakes	Hope Tech 3 X2	SRAM Guide R	SRAM Guide R
Rotor sizes	180mm	180mm	180/160mm
COMPONENTS			
Saddle	Cotic Cro-mo Rail	Charge Spoon	WTB Koda Race
Seatpost	X-Fusion Manic 150mm	RockShox Reverb 150mm	Level 150mm
Handlebar	Cotic Calver 780mm	Rental 35 800mm	Race Face Chester 780mm
Stem	Cotic Short 35mm	Pace 35mm	Race Face Chester 40mm
Rating	8	9	7



MY BEST TRAIL

Mtb's movers and shakers select their favourite places to ride



AS CHOSEN BY...

**ROWAN SORRELL,
RIDER AND TRAIL BUILDER**



Rowan raced World Cup downhill for years before founding trail building company Back On Track, responsible for some of the best-loved trails in the UK. He's also a director at BikePark Wales

Ask any long-standing biker what their favourite trail is, and I think most would say it is difficult to choose just one. Mountain biking is a rich and engaging sport because of the hugely varied terrain and the landscapes that we get to ride in. In some respects, the bike is simply the tool to allow us to access and experience some special places that can reach deep into our soul and create that feeling of awe that only being truly surrounded by nature provides.

That's why I was drawn to my line of work, trail-building, as for me the experience that a trail can give you blows any bike tech out of the water — it's all about the trail and the ride. In particular, trails in the Czech Republic and India stand out as having given me cultural experiences that have stayed with me long after leaving.

That said, my favourite trail isn't one that I have worked on.

No, my favourite rides are on trails that have generally been created by man many years ago and continually shaped by nature and what I enjoy most is that

first run where you hit it blind and don't know what is around the next crest or bend. I've been fortunate enough to travel to ride in many countries on some truly amazing trails in my time. Just in the past year I can think of a few that stand out as being right up there as favourites. Riding in the Aosta valley had some all-time great trail riding; the Karma Gutza trail used in this year's EWS in Blue Derby Tasmania is a very special trail, combining the tech of the natural slab and boulders in the area with crazy flow; and in BC I rode a trail near Lillooet last year that just had so much speed and incredible dirt that you got to the bottom thinking it was the best run you had ever done.

However, the trail that I think takes it for me is Pressure Drop near Robins Bay,

Jamaica. The whole experience is out of this world — a short but steep technical climb that gets your heart pounding out of your chest before a brief downhill respite within the woods spits you out into a grassy clearing and one of the best views from a trail in the world. Overlooking the Caribbean Sea, with the trail and forest descending below, it's ridiculously idyllic. The trail continues on down past patches of farmland, tall grasses and bamboo before going back into woodland and pushing on down a fast and flowy rock-strewn gully requiring full commitment. The trail finishes on a secluded small bay with a black sand beach. This is tropical island life at its best, away from any crowds and vivid in colour — it's the one trail I always want to relive.

Overlooking the Caribbean Sea, with the trail and forest descending below, it's ridiculously idyllic

► GENIUS eRIDE



UPLIFT YOUR HORIZON

eRIDE

Design with love, loves to be ridden. With Bosch battery up to 1125Wh, 150mm of travel front and rear, an avant-garde carbon design, and a complete new geometry, the Genius eRIDE is the ultimate choice for riders who want clean any climb and tackle any descent.



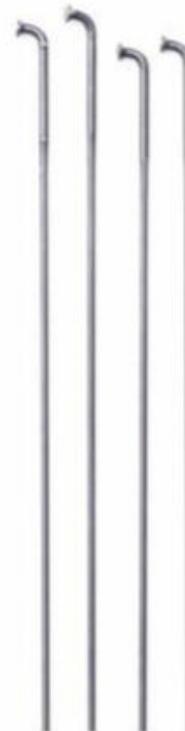
HUNT ENDURO WIDE WHEELSET 33MM INTERNAL RIM WIDTH



BOOST / STANDARD H LOCK TUBELESS READY 1994 G 27.5" / 2064 G 29" £359



HUNT 3 DEGREE ENGAGEMENT & PAWLS 120 POINTS
SUPER FAST 3 DEGREE ENGAGEMENT & PAWLS 120 POINTS
LARGE DOUBLE CONTACT SEALED JAPANESE BEARINGS
EXTRA HUB SEALS AND SPYLIDING



TRIPLE BUTTED PILAR REINFORCED 2.2MM HEAD
DIFFERENTIAL HIGH SPOKE COUNTS 32 FRONT 36 REAR
SWEDISH SANDVIK STAINLESS STEEL



<<< AVAILABLE PRE FITTED WITH >>>



6069 T6 HIGH STRENGTH ALLOY 490MPA UTS +69% VS 6061 T6
WELDED JOINT, THICKER SIDEWALLS, HIGH IMPACT
RESISTANCE, SHOT PEENED, WORK-HARDENED SURFACE



MAXXIS